Men-at-Arms

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Army of the Republic of Vietnam 1955–75

Gordon L. Rottman • Illustrated by Ramiro Bujeiro

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Artist's note

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Abbreviations used in text

AFV	armored fighting vehicle
ANV	*Armée Nationale Vietnamienne,* 1951–55
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam, 1955–75 (pronounced "Ar-vin")
BAR	Browning Automatic Rifle
CEFEO	French Far East Expeditionary Corps, 1946–55
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
JGS	Joint General Staff
MR	Military Region
NLF	National Liberation Front
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PF	Popular Force
RF	Regional Force
RR	recoilless rifle
RVN	Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
VC	Viet Cong (NLF armed forces)

TITLE PAGE **Saigon, Tet Offensive, February 1968: an ARVN Ranger fires at enemy movement; note the AN/PRC-25 radio carried on an aluminum rucksack frame. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)**

ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM 1955–75

INTRODUCTION

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam was one of the many enigmas of the Vietnam War. For a country of its size and population, South Vietnam possessed one of the largest and best-equipped among comparable armies, but the ARVN was an organization of strikingly inconsistent capabilities. It had great potential, but for a wide variety of reasons it often failed to fulfil expectations. Nevertheless, there are many examples of operations, large and small, in which ARVN troops performed valiantly and effectively. The ARVN as a whole has been vilified, but at the same time some of its elements have been justly praised.

There were many reasons for the ARVN's grave overall inadequacies, which left a legacy to which no army would aspire. It has been criticized for being inefficient and unprofessional, unmotivated and ineffectual, guilty of terrible treatment of its own citizens, hobbled by a cumbersome command structure and weakened by an institutional unwillingness to fight, and its officer corps (particularly at senior levels) has been condemned as self-serving, politically devious, and corrupt. Many of these charges are true to varied degrees; but to understand them it is necessary to look deeper, into the cultural and historical background that made any direct comparison between the ARVN and US forces meaningless.

The size of this book does not allow analysis of the reasons behind these charges, but they can be briefly summarized. The fledgling Republic of Vietnam suffered from a lack of national solidarity and of achievable political goals, and was failed by self-serving politicians and commanders at national and local levels. It was riven by differing cultural and religious traditions – partly born of the influx of North Vietnamese refugees at the time of partition in 1954–55 – and by a long "warlord" tradition of local power-brokers. It was weakened by the legacy of the French colonizers; by the broad gulf between the uneducated peasant population and the French-developed upper classes; and – paradoxically – by the overshadowing presence of the Americans.

An M60 machine gunner slithers through the mud during a training exercise. Despite the manpower demands of extended combat operations, ARVN units were rotated through training programs to upgrade their capabilities. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

The American–Vietnamese relationship

This last was as responsible for the contradictory character of the ARVN as were the myriad of other reasons. In its development of the ARVN from a hodge-podge of individual colonial units into a potentially powerful army the US did many

things right, but there were things it did wrong. Militarily the main problem area was tolerating a dual command system rather than establishing a true combined operational command of all US, Vietnamese, and Free World forces. There was, of course, a degree of coordination and integration between the American and Vietnamese commands, but the relationship was cumbersome and barely responsive.

The psyche of the Vietnamese people was barely understood by the vast majority of Americans, whose habits of mind were formed by an utterly different world. Even when senior US officers and diplomats did study local attitudes their understanding remained limited, and could seldom be adequately incorporated into policy or decision-making. The Americans' "can-do" determination to get the job done, and done right, was beyond the comprehension of many Vietnamese, products of a fatalistic Asian culture; conversely, the Americans were frustrated that a people whom they were trying to help showed little inclination to invest themselves in their own national cause.

An American advisor assigned to an ARVN unit would try to inflict his new ideas, but typically he would be gone in a year, to be replaced by another with different ideas, while the unit's ARVN officers would still be there, trying to cope. The Americans often rushed changes and expansions through before the Vietnamese were ready for them. The development of Vietnamese officers, NCOs, and technicians capable of real leadership and of absorbing unfamiliar doctrine and new equipment – and thus, the creation of experienced cadres around which to form new units – could never keep up with the pace of expansion. All this was in the midst of a vicious, large-scale war against a well-trained and resolute enemy, in very difficult terrain and climatic conditions, in a country with barely developed infrastructure.

ARVN Rangers trudge through a swamp accompanied by a US advisor; these Americans were authorized to wear the uniform and headgear of the unit to which they were attached. Ranger advisors were all graduates of the eight-week US Army Ranger Course. Note the use of M1 or M2 carbines and M1 Garand rifles, probably dating this photo before 1966/67.

Among the Vietnamese there was a widespread feeling of "Why fight, if the Americans are willing to do it for us?" As LtGen Nguyen Cao Ky would write: "Always emphasizing the role of the Americans in Vietnam, they transformed the Vietnam War into a conflict between the United States and North Vietnam, relegating the people, the government and the armed forces of South Vietnam to a subordinate role. The government of South Vietnam thus became, in the eyes of the people of Vietnam and of the world, a puppet regime serving the interests of American imperialists."

This bred a national inferiority complex that naturally infected the ARVN. Virtually everything the army used, from mosquito repellent and boots to rifles and artillery, was made in the USA. It was not difficult for VC propagandists to convince ARVN soldiers that they were "imperialist puppet troops," since

it was not far from the truth. Regardless of the fact that it was their country that was at stake, many could not truly feel that it was "their war." A common American perception was that they did not have the will to fight to preserve their country, and many US soldiers were resentful not only of the ARVN's apparent ineptitude but of their lack of motivation. While Vietnamese forces were engaged over a much longer span of time than US forces, there is still an obvious differential in casualty rates: US – 47,424 killed in action and 313,616 wounded; ARVN – at least 185,528 KIA and 499,026 WIA.

In the rubble of Saigon, a Ranger covers his buddy while he reloads M16 magazines. The Tet counter-offensive against the coordinated VC attacks on South Vietnam's cities in February 1968 was one of the occasions when units of the ARVN General Reserve performed notably well. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

The American soldiers themselves had little praise for the ARVN, but the reality was that most of them seldom worked closely with the Vietnamese. Combined operations might see US and ARVN battalions on the same battlefield, but they operated separately, and Americans seldom saw the ARVN in action. When they did see them in the field they often presented a sad image, with apparently poor discipline and unmilitary bearing (not that all US units could claim "elite" status, by any means). To Americans the South Vietnamese soldier was "Marvin the ARVN" or, sarcastically, "Marvelous Marv," and over the radio they were "Victor Novembers" (the phonetic alphabet for Vietnamese) or simply "little people." The cultural gulf was so wide that to Americans the Vietnamese were often beyond all understanding.

The country, and the enemy

The Republic of Vietnam (RVN) was a roughly crescent-shaped country measuring some 700 miles north to south and between 40 and 130 miles wide. It was bordered to the east and south by the South China Sea, to the west by Laos and Cambodia, and to the north by the 17th Parallel and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing it from North Vietnam – the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). From the DMZ down to the Saigon area in the south the coast was edged by a fertile plain where much of the population lived. Inland were the Central Highlands of rugged, forested mountains enclosing a central plateau, which sloped off to the south in a piedmont of rolling, wooded terrain. The southernmost quarter of the country was covered by the low, flat Mekong Delta. Roads and railroads served the coastal plain, and some roads reached into the interior, but for the most part the inland transportation system was very sparse. The ARVN and Free World forces used every means available – tracked and wheeled vehicles, watercraft, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters – to take the fight to their elusive enemy, who used the vast forests, swamps and rugged hills to hide their movements, but mostly the terrain demanded exhausting physical effort by men in boots.

Besides the terrain and climate there were two enemies. The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (*Mat tran Dan toc Giai phong mien Nam Viet Nam*) or NLF was a political organization that superimposed its own parallel government on RVN territory. Its insurgent military arm was the People's Liberation Army, PLA (*Quan Doi Giai Phong*); they were usually called the Viet Cong or VC, a contraction of *Dang Viet Nam Cong San* (Vietnamese Communist Party).[1] Although born of the Viet

Hanoi, 1954: Paratroopers of the *Armée Nationale Vietnamienne* 3rd Airborne Battalion (in Vietnamese, *TD3ND*, or in French, 3e BPVN) on parade, led by two NCOs of the unit's French cadre. The establishment of an ANV *bataillon aéroporté* was 12 French and 22 Vietnamese officers, 58 French and 51 Vietnamese NCOs, and 67 French and 618 Vietnamese enlisted men. (ECPA)

Minh that had fought the French in 1946–54, the PLA had formally been created in October 1960. The other enemy was the People's Army of Vietnam, PAVN (*Quan Doi Dang Dan*), more commonly known as the North Vietnamese Army, NVA – the army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Communist state established in 1954 when France withdrew from her former colony of Tonkin.[2]

Both of these forces were so resolute, proficient, and formidable that the ARVN generally found itself hard-pressed even to contain them, but on many occasions, either with or without US support, ARVN elements did prove capable of defeating NVA/VC efforts. Despite the self-serving, corrupt and incompetent commanders found at all echelons, even within poor-quality divisions there were many officers of just the opposite material. Unfortunately, there were occasions when officers who performed well were punished or removed, for showing up the inadequacies of others. There were some divisions with extremely good reputations, especially the 1st Infantry, Airborne, and Marine Divisions; others were considered effective at different periods, when they were led by high-quality commanders. Some divisions never rose above the poor or marginal standard, but even within these formations there were sometimes units that performed well; this was especially true when Vietnamese commanders and their US advisors developed effective relationships.

EVOLUTION OF THE ARVN

Between December 1946 and spring 1954 the French Far East Expeditionary Corps (CEFEO) had attempted – latterly, with US material and financial aid – to hold on to France's colonial Indochinese Union (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), against, in Vietnam, the Communist Viet Minh insurgent movement born during its World War II occupation by Japanese forces.[3] The main arena of the war had been North Vietnam (Tonkin), where in March–May 1954 a catastrophic defeat at Dien Bien Phu finally destroyed France's national will to fight. On April 27, 1954, the international Geneva Conference granted Indochina independence from France; the French were to evacuate North Vietnam, with subsequent

1 See Osprey Warrior 116: *Viet Cong Fighter*
2 See Warrior 135: *North Vietnamese Army Soldier 1958–75*; and Elite 38: *The NVA and Viet Cong*
3 See Men-at-Arms 322: *The French Indochina War 1946–54.* The French had colonised South Vietnam in the 1860s, and Central and North Vietnam in the 1880s.

elections both North and South to determine the future status of the two supposedly transitional states. About 800,000 largely Roman Catholic refugees fled south, with US assistance, before French withdrawal from the North in October 1954. South Vietnam, carved out of Cochinchina (French South Vietnam) and about two-thirds of Annam (Central Vietnam), was established as an independent nation by the Geneva Accords on July 21, 1955.

The elections never took place. In the North, Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh ruthlessly purged all dissenting elements and established the Communist DRV. In the South, the Republic of Vietnam (*Cong Hoa Mien Nam Viet Nam*) was declared on October 26, 1955, when Premier Ngo Dinh Diem seized control through a rigged referendum. Diem pressed for the departure of the remaining CEFEO troops sooner than had been anticipated, preferring the US backing that he had already been negotiating, and all French forces left the RVN by April 1956. Although the CIA had been active throughout these events, the first US military advisors arrived on February 12, 1955. At that point America inherited a then-latent but soon widespread guerrilla war, and responsibility for the remnants of an untrained, under-equipped, poorly motivated army that was "national" in name only.

US and French advisors inspect a US-equipped Vietnamese National Army unit in 1955; the troops are armed with M1 Garand rifles, but still wear the plastic liners of French M1951 steel helmets and M1947 *treillis de combat* fatigues. Note (center) a US-supplied 2.36in M9A1 bazooka. Other crew-served weapons that would be supplied included the 3.5in M20A1 bazooka, the 57mm M18A1 and 75mm M20 recoilless rifles, and – late in the war, to selected units only – the 90mm M67 and 106mm M40A1 RRs. (Courtesy Paxton Williams)

L'Armée Nationale Vietnamienne

From the first, the French had recruited both units of Indochinese auxiliaries (*supplétifs*), and local volunteers to bulk out regular CEFEO units. In 1953 these Indochinese in French regular ranks numbered some 53,000 – a significant figure, given a total CEFEO regular strength of about 175,000 – and this "*jaunissement*" ("yellowing") had brought some French units up to 50 percent local manpower.

Separately from the CEFEO, the Vietnamese National Army, ANV (*Quan doi Quoc gia Viet Nam*) had been instituted by the French in July 1951, nominally under the control of a new Vietnamese Ministry of Defense. The USA undertook to provide material aid for the new force, though equipment deliveries were delayed by the simultaneous demands of the Korean War. The ANV was never an army in the true sense, however, but merely a collection of individual battalions and companies. For the first year or two the original units were incorporated within French regiments and led by large cadres of French officers and senior NCOs. From winter 1952/53 these units were split off as ANV battalions, while many others were formed from scratch, most of them with at best a handful of French advisors. Illiteracy and local prejudices denied promotion to many of the most battle-wise junior leaders – often from ethnic minorities – from the pre-existing auxiliary units. The combat performance of the ANV in 1951–54 was extremely patchy, ranging from the admirable to the pitiful; it often reflected the ethnic composition of particular units, in an army conscripted from among the whole diverse population of the peninsula. By the end of 1953 the ANV claimed a strength of some 160,000 men, in four purely "paper" regional divisions, but in fact there were no higher echelons

ARVN infantrymen carry a litter casualty. While their web gear is mostly US issue, the leftmost man still has a French canteen, identifiable by its wide mouth. Note that they carry Garand rifles (“*Sung Truong M1*”). After the US took over sponsorship from the French in 1955 the US weapons of World War II and Korean War vintage that had been supplied by MAAG for the old ANV continued to be issued in larger numbers and variety, with French types being gradually relegated to militia forces. Superior in many cases, the US weapons were, however, no more compatible with Vietnamese stature. The average Vietnamese was 5ft 1in–5ft 4in tall (1.57–1.63m) and weighed 110–122lb (50–55kg); US small arms were designed for men at least 4in taller and 20–30lb heavier. Apart from their greater weight and sometimes sharper recoil, the buttstocks were often too long for comfortable aiming. (Courtesy Paxton Williams)

of command other than a few two-battalion mobile groups; for major operations individual units were simply attached to French formations in temporary task forces. There was a military academy for training officers, but there was no National Army headquarters, indigenous general staff, or logistics organization.[4]

Many of the ANV units were disbanded as the French withdrew, leaving South Vietnam with a shadow of an army that the Americans had to transform into something capable of performing internal security and conventional defensive missions. The first US proposal in the spring of 1954, before complete French withdrawal was anticipated, was to consolidate the existing 80-plus battalions – many of them tied down in static security duties – into four “light” and three “field” (medium) divisions, plus a reserve of eight battalions. It was proposed to detach some of the French and experienced Vietnamese troops from existing battalions as cadres for new mobile units, to be led by the French and equipped by the US. (This underlines a major contrast in French and American control and training of Vietnamese units. The French used almost exclusively their own officers and senior NCOs to lead the units, while the Americans would later attach advisors to ARVN units that were led by their own officers. Both methods have their pros and cons: the American method was intended to yield long-term benefits by letting Vietnamese officers lead and learn for themselves rather than doing it for them, which is only a short-term solution.)

Army of the Republic of Vietnam

America’s aims were to establish the independence of Vietnam; to create a central military administration, and to standardize the command of the Vietnamese Army; and to organize tactical divisions out of the existing galaxy of independent battalions. Their primary concern was not insurgency, but the risk of a Korean-style invasion from North Vietnam. There were other threats beside the Communists, however. The new regime in the South also had to contend internally with militant religious and political sects such as the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, with perhaps 25,000 armed men in all, and the much smaller but well-organized Binh Xuyen bandits; these factions would have to be repressed through the late 1950s and into 1960.

In 1955 US advisors first recommended a 100,000-man army. RVN officials felt the need for larger forces, since the North Vietnamese were expanding their own, but the US government was reluctant to fund

4 The 1st Div, in the south, had 9 bns, but the 2nd, in Central Vietnam, only 4; the 3rd Div had 9 bns in the main cockpit of the war, the northern Red River Delta region, and the 4th (Mountain) Div, also in Central Vietnam, had its full authorization of 7 bns. For local security 4 guard regts, 4 mountain guard bdes, and many independent companies were scattered throughout the country.

a larger army – at that time the French were expected to remain in-country. Lieutenant-General John W. O'Daniel, commanding US Army, Pacific, led a mission to Vietnam to assess the situation, and proposed a 150,000-man army (including 8,000 naval and air personnel). At that time Washington held the view that the ARVN need only be an internal security force, but the prospect of almost immediate French withdrawal then demanded a defensive capability to face any external attack. O'Daniel recommended four field and six light divisions, plus 13 territorial regiments for internal security, the latter to be formed into three or four additional light divisions if required.

Vietnamese National Army troops demonstrate crew drill on French 81mm M1927/31 mortars. The US 81mm M1 mortar, license-built from the French model, was virtually identical but had a smaller base plate. Other heavy mortars supplied during the war included the 81mm M29 and 4.2in M2 and M30. (Courtesy Paxton Williams)

The increase was approved by Washington in August 1955, and the concentration of units into divisions was ordered. However, when the ANV's transformation into the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (*Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, QLVNCH) was declared on December 30, 1955, the new Vietnamese government could not even pay its army. The influx of refugees from the North had provided a source of additional manpower, but draftees intended to be placed in the reserves were being released from their already inadequate two months' training after just five weeks. While the Americans strove to instill the concept of battalions being permanently assigned to regiments and divisions, some units were inactivated, others amalgamated, and new ones raised, and during this time-consuming process some units were never fully formed.

Besides tactical and equipment training, in 1956 a major US effort had to be made to recover, check and redistribute the loaned US equipment turned in by the departing French; this required the instruction of Vietnamese in modern logistical and maintenance management techniques. In 1956 US advisors and key Vietnamese officers also developed plans for establishing a professional school system – officer and staff schools, technical schools, and branch training schools – to be fully developed over the coming years. During this period ARVN officers began to be sent to the US to attend advanced schools, and this would continue throughout the war (for example, more than 700 ARVN officers attended the US Army Armor School).

ANV artillerymen serving the 105mm M2A1 howitzer (redesignated the M101A1 in 1962). Originally each field division had a single battalion of 105mm howitzers with three four-gun batteries; batteries were increased to six guns in 1963, and a second divisional battalion was soon added. (Courtesy Paxton Williams)

COMMAND STRUCTURE

The army command structure under President Diem was basically a shambles, with conflicting, duplicated, and overlapping chains of command.

1955: LtGen Samuel T. Williams, Commanding General, US Military Assistance and Advisory Group, Vietnam (1955–60), is introduced to staff officers of Military Region 2. They wear American-style khaki uniforms, the black shoulder boards bearing gold braid stripes and rank insignia of metal blossoms. The shoulder patch is that of the early Political Warfare School: a blue field with white-edged red flames, white star, and black border. (Courtesy Paxton Williams)

Ministry of Defense staff departments and agencies were in widely separated locations, with unclear lines of communication and responsibility. Little effort was made to coordinate their activities; they tended to function unilaterally, jealously protecting their turf in endless internal squabbles. Command and control was haphazard, with commanders at every level receiving conflicting orders directly from higher commanders who skipped echelons without informing intermediate commanders – even President Diem sent orders directly to battalion commanders from his own radio van. To make matters worse, Diem's political party, the Can Lao, had secret cells at all echelons of command, furthering the president's personal interests and monitoring the loyalty of officers. Chain-of-command problems would persist throughout the war, with higher commanders at all echelons jumping intermediate headquarters, and even lower-echelon commanders going over the heads of their immediate superiors to some more senior officer to whom they were obligated.

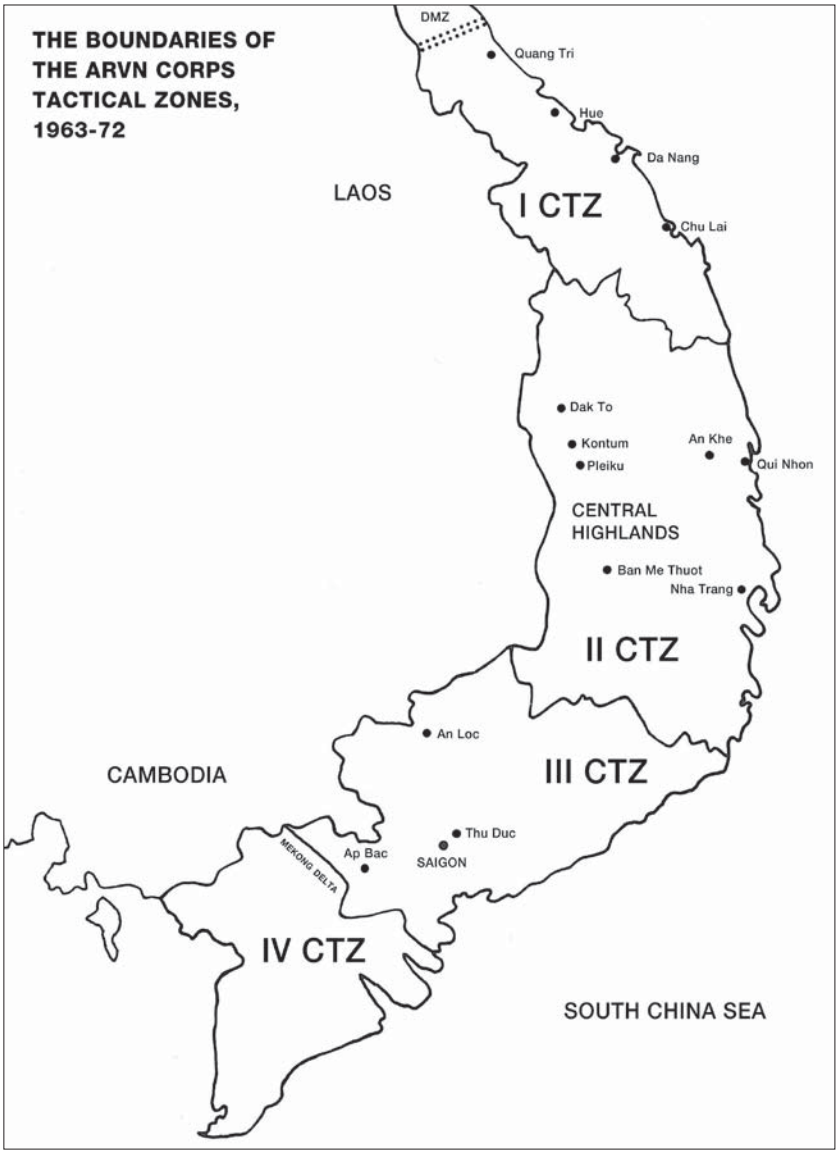
Other chronic problems including the embezzlement and diversion of funds, the theft and sale of supplies and equipment, the listing of non-existent troops on payrolls so that officers could pocket their wages, and – all too often – the passing of intelligence to the VC. Many officers either had relatives in the VC, were coerced with threats to their families, or simply sold the information. When operations found a promising area devoid of VC, or the government unit was ambushed, a common explanation was that "The VC were on the operation order's distribution list."

Joint General Staff

The JGS was established in 1955 under the Ministry of Defense, and all of Vietnam's armed forces came under this one ministry and joint staff.[5] The Chief of the JGS, a full general, was assisted by a deputy chief doubling as commander of the Regional Force/Popular Force (RF/PF), and a chief of staff. Over time there were minor changes, but essentially, deputy chiefs of staff headed Personnel, Logistics, Training, Political Warfare, Plans, and Operations departments. Under Operations were the Intelligence, Operations, and Communications sections, and the Joint Operations Center. Also directly under the JGS were various commands and forces including the Vietnamese Air Force and Navy; three special staffs for the Armor,

ARVN officer cadets of the Dalat academy in full ceremonial dress white uniforms. The epaulets, standing collars, and cuff patches are red. (Courtesy Paxton Williams)

5 There had been small naval and air elements within the ANV, almost entirely French-led. Under the RVN these became separate services, under the JGS: the Vietnamese Navy (*Hai Quan Viet Nam*), with a small Marine Corps (*Thuy Quan Luc Chien*), and the Vietnamese Air Force (*Khong Quan Viet Nam*). The Navy would be one of the world's largest, even though mostly equipped with patrol, coastal, and amphibious craft. By 1974 the VNAF ("vee-naff") would become the world's sixth largest air force; helicopters, which would become crucial in Vietnam, were assigned to the VNAF and not, as was US practice, to the Army. See Robert C. Mikesh, *Flying Dragons* (Osprey, 1988).



Regime changes

In the early 1960s, President Diem and his Roman Catholic clique monopolized power and handled confrontations with the Buddhist majority among the population with unwise contempt and brutality. Dissatisfaction with the Diem regime led to a military coup on November 1, 1963, resulting in Diem's death.

Things did not improve under the rule of Gen Duong Van Minh, and a second coup on January 29, 1964 overturned his regime in turn. To avoid the appearance of a military dictatorship, MajGen Nguyen Kanh placed Dr Phan Huy Quat in office; he was subsequently replaced as prime minister by VNAF LtGen Nguyen Cao Ky.

Ky lost the 1967 presidential election to ARVN LtGen Nguyen Van Thieu, but became vice-president. President Thieu remained in power to the bitter end in 1975.

Artillery, and Ranger commands; Special Forces (virtually a branch of service in its own right); and the two divisions of the General Reserve – the Airborne and Marine Divisions – whose elements were deployable throughout the country, and could be attached to corps (the Marines were administratively and logistically a component of the Navy, but belonged operationally to the JGS).[6] Also under the JGS were the four regional operational commands, I–IV Corps, plus Capital Military District, which oversaw military and police operations in the Saigon area.

Regional commands

I and II Corps were activated in June and October 1957; III Corps was provisionally organized in March 1959 and made permanent in May 1960;

6 The Vietnamese Special Forces (*Luc Luong Dac Biet*, LLDB) are discussed in Elite 29: *Vietnam Airborne*. For the VN Marine Corps, see Elite 43: *Vietnam Marines 1965–73*.

Saigon, Tet counter-offensive, February 1968: a 76mm gun-armed M41A3 Walker Bulldog light tank in street fighting. Tank units were a corps asset, and the M41A3 was the most widely used ARVN type; it began to replace the earlier M24 Chaffee in the tank squadrons of the corps armored cavalry regiments from January 1965. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

Small numbers of women were recruited in auxiliary status to serve in the ARVN on administrative, staff, communications, political warfare, and other non-combatant duties. These Women's Army Corps personnel wear black caps, black epaulet loops and name tapes on their white blouses, and forest-green skirts. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

and IV Corps was split off from III Corps in January 1963. Each corps headquarters included a commanding general and his deputy, chief of staff, conventional staff departments and deputy chiefs of staff for RF/PF and political warfare; corps artillery with two to four battalions, an engineer group with three battalions, area logistical command, and one to three armored cavalry regiments (later consolidated into a group, then a brigade). Typically, two or three infantry divisions were assigned to each corps. Province chiefs answered directly to the regional corps commander.

The Vietnamese command structure was overly complicated in two major respects. They divided their forces into three echelons. Most ARVN forces served as main or mobile forces under the corps commanders or the JGS itself. The next echelon was the Regional Force battalions and companies assigned to the province and sector chiefs; while full-time units, these militia remained under the control of the sector chief even if there was a corps commander for the RF/PF, and only participated in short-term local operations in support of the ARVN. At the district level were the static Popular Force companies and platoons; these were under sub-sector control, and were only intended to provide security for small communities.

There were also units assigned to the Military Regions, MR (*Vung*). From 1954 there were three MRs plus the Capital MR, but they were increased to five in 1956. In 1959 MR I encompassed the area north and west of Saigon, with 4 Field and 11 and 13 Light Divisions assigned. MR II contained the northernmost provinces, with I Corps and 1 and 2 Field Divisions. MR III was in the Central Highlands, with 12 and 14 Light

Divisions. MR IV was sandwiched between MR I and II, with II Corps and 3 Field and 15 Light Divisions. MR V covered the Mekong Delta, with 16 Light Division. Many of these divisions were under the direct control of the JGS.

This was an extremely cumbersome and redundant dual-command arrangement, and the system was revamped to give the corps operational control of most divisions. Geographically, I Corps was responsible for the country from the DMZ south to Da Nang, II Corps covered all of the Central Highlands, and III Corps initially the whole southern part of the country.

The next step was to eliminate the five redundant MR headquarters and create four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ). The new corps operated within fixed boundaries and served as both an operational and regional command, with divisions and other maneuver units reassigned between corps as necessary. It was to accommodate this plan that IV Corps was activated in 1963, covering the southern region west of the Mekong River. The CTZs were each divided into several numbered Division Tactical Zones (DTZ); for example, III CTZ comprised 31–34 DTZ. These were fixed zones, and did not coincide with the numbering of actual infantry divisions – in fact, a DTZ was often not assigned a division; they were simply coordinating entities, and gradually fell from use. Divisions generally remained within a specific CTZ, though might very occasionally be relocated to another; officers' and enlisted men's families lived on or outside unit bases, and apart from the General Reserve units the ARVN was far from being a truly nationwide-deployable force, remaining essentially territorial. (As US forces withdrew in 1972, the CTZs were again redesignated as military regions – MR I, II, III, and IV.)

Each ARVN corps possessed a three-battalion engineer group; here a welder of 30 Engineer Bn prepares a beam for the erection of a new bridge as part of the effort to rebuild and reopen the country's highway system. (The French-built railroads had essentially been destroyed by 1962, but lengthy stretches of track also began to be reopened in 1969.) Note the welder's left shoulder patch; engineer battalions all wore halved white-and-red shields, with a black bulldozer in silhouette and a number at top right, basically similar to the design of the artillery battalion patch, which bore a cannon silhouette instead. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

All of these entities – the original MRs, CTZs, DTZs, and the later MRs renamed from CTZs – followed provincial politico-administrative boundaries. To complicate matters, each of the 44 provinces, each with their two to ten districts, was also a military tactical area. Nearly all of the province and district chiefs were military officers – typically a lieutenant-colonel at province level, referred to as a "sector headquarters," and a captain or first lieutenant in charge of a district or "sub-sector headquarters" (majors could be found commanding either). Besides acting as the governor and administrator for the province or district, the chief was also responsible for the security of towns and villages. They served as coordinators to clear artillery and air-delivered fires, since ARVN, US, other Free World, and RF/PF units might all be in the same area. Sector headquarters controlled RF units, and sub-sectors PF units.

Additionally, there were "special tactical zones," STZs (*Khu Chien Thuat*), which were assigned their own maneuver forces, usually an independent regiment or Ranger units. These were subordinate

to the CTZ and equated to brigade-level commands. One example is 24 STZ, responsible for the Kontum area in II CTZ and assigned 42 Infantry Regiment and 221 Artillery Battalion. Another, 44 STZ, was at Cao Lanh; responsible for three provinces on the southern Cambodian border, it was formed to take pressure off the three stretched ARVN divisions in IV CTZ, and relied mostly on RF/PF and on Civilian Irregular Defense Group units advised by US Special Forces. Another was the Rung Sat Special Zone encompassing the Long Tao Channel, the shipping passage up the Mekong to Saigon; this was under Navy control, but ARVN units were assigned. The Quang Da Special Zone, responsible for the Hue-Da Nang-Chu Lai area in I CTZ, was assigned 51 Infantry Regiment.

DIVISIONAL ORGANIZATION

ARVN organizational structures were based, via French practice, on American models of the early 1950s, but did not parallel them exactly.

Divisions were numbered randomly in no discernible sequence, and underwent frequent redesignations prior to 1960 – partly intended to confuse the enemy as to how many divisions were operational. Numbered regiments were usually assigned to divisions in sequential blocks, but reassignments between divisions sometimes disrupted these; occasionally independent regiments, usually numbered in the 50-series, were assigned to divisions. Battalions were numbered in sequence (1–3) within regiments, and companies were numbered in sequence within battalions.

Vietnamese unit designations were constructed in the order: unit size, numeric designation, and branch of service. Ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, etc.) were not used. Thus, for example, 5 Infantry Division was *Su Doan 5 Bo Binh* (*SD5BB*). *Su Doan* means "master column" – a large formation; and *Bo Binh* means "afoot troop" – infantry. 1 Battalion, 9 Infantry Regiment was *Tieu Doan 1*, *Trung Doan 9 Bo Binh* (*TD1TrD9BB*). *Tieu Doan* means "small column," and *Trung Doan* "medium column" – i.e. battalion, and regiment.

ARVN branch/function and unit/formation terms

Note: In this text no attempt is made to translate Vietnamese designations literally, nor to reproduce the diacritical marks (accents) of the Romanized Vietnamese alphabet. Note too that in many cases the NVA/VC used different military terminology.

Infantry	*Bo Binh*	Squad	*Tieu Doi*
Airborne	*Nhay Du*	Platoon	*Trung Doi* (TRD)
Ranger	*Biet Dong Quan*	Detachment	*Biet Doi* (BD)
Artillery	*Phao Binh*	Company	*Dai Doi* (DD)
Armored cavalry	*Ky Binh*	Battery	*Phao Doi* (PD)
Reconnaissance	*Trinh Sat* or *Quan Bao*	Battalion	*Tieu Doan* (TD)
Engineer	*Cong Binh*	Squadron (armored)	*Thiet Doan*
Signal	*Truyen Tin*	Regiment	*Trung Doan* (TrD)
Ordnance	*Quan Cu*	Group	*Lien Doan* (LD)
Supply	*Tiep Van*	Task Force	*Chien Doan* (CD)
Transportation	*Van Tai*	Brigade	*Lu Doan* (LD)
Medical	*Quan Y*	Division	*Su Doan* (SD)
Administrative	*Cong Vu*	Corps	*Quan Doan* (QD)
Military police	*Quan Canh*		

Divisional organization pre-1959

General O'Daniel's recommended six light divisions were to be about one-third the size of a US infantry division, with 5,225 troops and minimal support units. A division consisted of three infantry regiments with three battalions each plus a regimental weapons company, and divisional headquarters, signal, intelligence, and ordnance (maintenance) companies. These were viewed as light mobile strike forces unencumbered by heavy equipment, intended to operate in mountains, jungles, and swamps. They had little transport and no artillery, but they had 30 percent more machine guns, 10 percent more BARs, and the same number of mortars as a US infantry division.

A mortar gunner hefts the 42lb weight of a 60mm M2 mortar through a swamp; the similar M19 mortar with trigger-fire capability was also supplied. The rifle company's weapons platoon was equipped with two 60mm mortars, and the most robustly built men had to be selected to carry them. This also applied to the .30cal M1918A2 BAR carried as the squad automatic weapon until the late 1960s, whose 19lb-plus weight and 4ft length were a real handful for a Vietnamese soldier. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

The four more potent field divisions were to be half the size of a US division; these were intended for action on more open terrain with good roads, namely the coastal plains that O'Daniel expected to be the main invasion route from the north. These 8,500-man divisions were organized the same as the light divisions, but with stronger infantry regiments; they also incorporated a 105mm artillery battalion, and divisional engineer, transportation, quartermaster (supply), and medical companies.

In 1955 Gen O'Daniel was succeeded as commander of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group, Vietnam, by LtGen Samuel T. Williams. Williams was tasked not with fighting a guerrilla war, but with building a conventional Vietnamese army capable of fending off an invasion from the North. His working material was unpromising: a miscellany of small units, capable of none but the most basic military operations, and scattered across the country to eliminate the armed sects and provide local security; an officer corps riddled with corruption and political factionalism; and barely existent logistical and administrative systems. The planned divisions had a purely paper identity; only 1 Field Div was actually formed, but had not conducted unit training. The American advisors of MAAG struggled to organize the dispersed units into divisions and commence their training, hampered by the dysfunctional Vietnamese command arrangements.

Beginning in 1956, logistical capabilities were increased; the first two corps headquarters were formed, as were two 155mm corps artillery battalions, and the three military regions were increased to five. An ordnance company was added to the light divisions, and most territorial regiments were dissolved to provide manpower for divisional regiments.

Divisional reorganization from 1959

General Williams aimed to give all divisions similar capabilities, rather than wasting resources on light divisions and territorial regiments that were inadequate to face an invasion. Studies for improving the division organization and fielding an enlarged single type began in 1959 and took more than a year. The new 10,450-man division was to comprise three infantry regiments; division artillery with one

ARVN infantry division activation, 1959–75

Field and light divisions existing prior to the 1959 reorganization are omitted; divisions existing during 1955–59 under those other designations were 1, 2, 5, 7, 21, 22, and 23 Divs (see divisional histories, below). Divisions are listed in order of activation:

1 Infantry Division	January 1, 1959
2 Infantry Division	January 1, 1959
5 Infantry Division	January 1, 1959
7 Infantry Division	January 1, 1959
22 Infantry Division	April 1, 1959
23 Infantry Division	April 1, 1959
21 Infantry Division	June 1, 1959
9 Infantry Division	January 1, 1962
25 Infantry Division	July 1, 1962
10/18 Infantry Division[1]	May 16, 1965
Airborne Division[2]	December 1, 1965
Marine Division[3]	October 1, 1968
3 Infantry Division	October 1, 1971

Notes:
(1) 10 Div was redesignated 18 Div on January 1, 1967
(2) The Abn Div was organized as the Abn Group on May 1, 1955, redesignated Abn Bde on December 1, 1959
(3) Not part of ARVN, but of the Navy; organized as the Marine Group on April 16, 1956, and redesignated Marine Bde on January 1, 1962

each 105mm howitzer and 4.2in mortar battalions; an engineer battalion; headquarters, reconnaissance, signal, transportation, ordnance, quartermaster, and medical companies; and a military police detachment.

The four field and six light divisions were dissolved, to create seven infantry divisions; four battalion-sized armored regiments, an airborne group and a marine group were also raised. While Gen Williams maintained that the more capable new divisions would be able to fight insurgent guerrillas in rugged terrain if necessary, in fact the ARVN was still a road-bound force relying heavily on conventional logistics. Increasing numbers of units were also being assigned static security duties in spite of the creation of new local security forces; in 1960, 34 of the army's 63 infantry battalions were tied down on such duties.

Additional infantry divisions were raised over the years: two in 1962, two in 1965, and one more in 1971 (in an inadequate attempt to compensate for the departure of nine US divisions). The years 1963–64 were critical; two back-to-back coups and continued political turmoil, coupled with the increasing tempo of the VC insurgency, were affecting ARVN morale and capabilities, and in spring 1965 the first major US ground forces arrived in-country, changing the character of the war forever. The ARVN then had 192,000 regular troops in four corps, with nine divisions, an airborne and a marine brigade, a special forces group, three independent regiments and 19 battalions, numerous Ranger units, plus service support units. Each division received an armored cavalry squadron in 1965/66.

In 1969–70 the divisions were upgraded, with most of the support and service companies enlarged to battalions, and division artillery was raised to four battalions. A division now had three infantry regiments, a 155mm and three 105mm howitzer battalions, engineer, signal, quartermaster, and medical battalions, plus division headquarters, military police, transportation, and administrative companies. A new divisional reconnaissance detachment was envisioned as a long-range patrol unit operating in small teams like their US LRRP counterparts, but this was not to be; they generally operated as companies conducting local patrols, and more often they served as headquarters security, escorting the commander and providing a ceremonial guard. There were also company-sized electronic warfare and technical (maintenance) detachments.

All infantry regiments were authorized a fourth battalion in 1965, and by 1966 most had been raised (23 Div still had only two regiments, and 18 Div was still short two battalions in 1968.)

Saigon, Tet 1968: Rangers halt while awaiting orders to advance. A 40mm M79 grenade-launcher can be seen, as issued on the scale of one per rifle squad from 1966/67 to replace the formerly-issued BAR. Many Vietnamese showed a natural ability with this light and compact weapon, which provided the squad with a useful increase in both direct and indirect firepower. The radio operator is using a backpack AN/PRC-25. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

This addition of 30 battalions, without having to activate three additional divisions and their support units, permitted divisions to expand their areas of operations, gave them more flexibility, and allowed battalions to be rotated for security duties and rest.

In 1971 the regiments returned to a three-battalion structure, but the remaining battalions received a fourth rifle company from the disbanded battalion; only 1 Div retained four battalions per regiment, in view of its special DMZ-defense status, but later 2 Div – also in I Corps – received fourth battalions. The ARVN was notoriously short of officers and NCOs; eliminating 30 battalion headquarters companies freed personnel and equipment to fill shortages in their parent division, and helped man the new 3 Div raised that year. There were gradual divisional strength increases through the years, mostly through enlarging support units. In 1970 strength was increased three times: in January to 13,454, in May to 13,994, and in August to 14,559.

At the time of American withdrawal in 1972 the ARVN consisted of 464,838 regulars, 300,646 Regional Force, 227,886 Popular Force, and over 2 million in the People's Self-Defense Force. Regular units included 11 infantry divisions (each with nine infantry and four artillery battalions and an armored cavalry squadron – two had 12 infantry battalions); four Ranger groups (each of three battalions); 33 Border Ranger battalions; four armored brigades (each of two armored cavalry regiments) plus three M48A3 tank battalions; 14 corps artillery battalions (five 105mm, four 155mm, five 175mm); four air defense battalions (40mm/quad .50cal); and more than 200 artillery sector platoons with 105mm howitzers. Additionally, the General Reserve had the Airborne and the Marine Division (each with nine infantry, three artillery, and a recon battalion), and three more Ranger groups. During the US run-down and withdrawal between mid-1969 and late 1972 a great deal of US equipment was turned over to the ARVN to provide them with more modern gear, rather than shipping it home.

This M79 grenadier wears a privately made vest for carrying 40mm rounds. Customized vests and jackets were common within the ranks of the ARVN. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

Example of ARVN infantry division order of battle, c.1969

Su Doan 18 Bo Binh	**18 Infantry Division**
Dai Doi 18 Tong Hanh Dinh	18 Headquarters Company
Trung Doan 43	Infantry Regiment 43
Trung Doan 48	Infantry Regiment 48
Trung Doan 52	Infantry Regiment 52
Phao binh cua Su doan:	Divisional Artillery:
Tieu Doan 180 Phao Binh	180 Artillery Battalion
Tieu Doan 181 Phao Binh	181 Artillery Battalion
Tieu Doan 182 Phao Binh	182 Artillery Battalion
Tieu Doan 183 Phao Binh	183 Artillery Battalion
Thiet Doan 5 Ky Binh	5 Armored Cavalry Squadron
Tieu Doan 18 Cong Binh	18 Engineer Battalion
Tieu Doan 18 Truyen Tin	18 Communication Battalion
Tieu Doan 18 Tiep Van	18 Quartermaster Battalion
Tieu Doan 18 Quan Y	18 Medical Battalion
Dai Doi 18 Van Tai	18 Transportation Company
Dai Doi 18 Quan Canh	18 Military Police Company
Dai Doi 18 Cong Vu	18 Administrative Company
Biet Doi Quan Bao	Special Reconnaissance Detachment
Biet Doi Tac Chien Dien Tu	Special Electronic Warfare Detachment
Biet Doi Ky Thuat	Special Technical Detachment

Rangers call for VC holdouts to surrender during the Tet 1968 fighting in Saigon. The officer using a megaphone is armed with a 7.62mm Type 56 assault rifle (Chinese version of the AK-47); the other man carries an M1 carbine. The soldier at left has on his back a locally made four-pocket pouch for M1A1 Thompson or M3A1 "grease gun" magazines; these SMGs were available to the ARVN in moderate numbers. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

DIVISIONAL HISTORIES

Orders of battle do not list divisional support and service units, which bore the parent division's number. Of the four artillery battalions, the first listed (ending with "0") was the 155mm battalion.

1 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 1, 3, 51, & 54 Inf Regts; 10, 11, 12, & 13 Arty Bns; 7 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 3.

Apparently created from assets of the ANV's *21e Groupe Mobile,* which had been deactivated December 15, 1954. The GM's staff provided the staff for 21 Inf Div on that date, and on January 1, 1955 its activation on February 1 was ordered. On August 1, 1955 the division was redesignated 21 Field Div; on November 1, 1955 it became 1 Field Div, and on January 1, 1959 it became 1 Inf Division.

In November 1955 its original 21, 22, and 23 Inf Regts were redesignated 1, 2, and 3 Regts, respectively. In September 1958, 54 Independent Inf Regt was assigned to 1 Div; in October 1971, 2 Inf Regt was reassigned to 3 Div. In late 1972, 51 Ind Inf Regt was assigned to 1 Div, making it once again a four-regiment division. From 1965 all four 1 Div infantry regiments were assigned four rather than three battalions.

This was the only one of the four original divisions organized from units raised in its area of operations – the northernmost Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces, where it remained throughout its existence. It was headquartered in Hue until January 1972, when it took over Camp Eagle south of the city from the US 101st Abn Div (Airmobile). The division had also maintained forward command posts at Dong Ha from October 1968 to January 1969, and at Ai Tu near Quang Tri City from February 1969 to September 1971.

The division conducted operations in Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, and Quang Ngai provinces as well as southern Laos; from 1971 it was responsible mainly for Thua Thien Province and Hue (after 3 Div had taken over Quang Tri on the DMZ). Because its area of operations was on the DMZ and it was often heavily engaged by the NVA it received high-quality commanders, its units were kept as well up to strength as possible, and it had priority for new equipment. In this regard its status was comparable to the Airborne and Marine Divisions.

2 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 4, 5, & 6 Inf Regts; 20, 21, 22, & 23 Arty Bns; 4 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 2.

Under the July 1954 Geneva Agreement, the North Vietnamese ANV *32e Groupe Mobile* was shipped south to Da Nang and deactivated in December 1954. Its units (with others withdrawn from the North) formed the nucleus of 32 Inf Div, organized on January 1, 1955. On August 1 this was redesignated 32 Field Div, and on November 1, 1955 as 2 Field Div; on January 1, 1959 it became 2 Inf Division. The original 31, 32, and 155 Inf Regts were redesignated in November 1955 as 6, 4, and 5 Regts, respectively; 1 Bn, 6 Inf Regt traced its lineage back to the oldest ANV unit, *Bataillon de Vietnam 2.*

The division's first major operation in early 1955 was *Giai Phong* (Operation *Liberation*); delivered by sea transport, it peacefully took control of southern Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces, the former Viet Minh Region 5. The division mostly operated in Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai provinces; its 4 Inf Regt was detached for operations in the Mekong Delta for several months in 1963. The HQ was relocated to Quang Ngai Citadel in May 1965; it moved to Chu Lai Camp in early 1972 after the US 198th Inf Bde departed.

3 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 2, 56, & 57 Inf Regts; 30, 31, 32, & 33 Arty Bns; 20 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 155.

This was the last ARVN division raised, activated on October 1, 1971 as the American withdrawal was underway. The departure of two US Marine divisions left a significant void in the northern MR I; the new division was responsible for defending the DMZ while the more mobile 1 Inf Div secured the remainder of northern I CTZ. Divisional HQ was at Ai Tu Camp near Quang Tri City. The division's original 56 Inf Regt, activated on December 1, 1971, and 57 Inf Regt, raised on February 1, 1972, were joined by 2 Inf Regt from 1 Div on October 1, 1972. (57 Regt was formed from battalions drawn from 2 and 51 Regts plus a newly raised battalion; the two contributed battalions were later replaced by new units.) Some higher quality Regional Force units in MR I were also absorbed into the division.

By the time of the NVA Easter Offensive of 1972 the division had reached full strength; suffering heavy losses, it was pulled back to Da Nang for rebuilding. From mid-1972 the division operated in Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces, providing security for the Que Son Valley and Da Nang, with HQ on the edge of Da Nang at a former American base known as Freedom Hill.

5 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 7, 8, & 9 Inf Regts; 50, 51, 52, & 53 Arty Bns; 1 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 70.

At the time of French withdrawal from the North, ethnic Chinese Nung troops of the Frontier Guard that they had formed on the northern borders were evacuated by sea to Binh Thuan Province, and stationed at Song Meo. Formation of what became known as the "Nung Division" began in November 1954, and it was officially activated on February 1, 1955 as 6 Inf Division. During 1955 it was redesignated three times: as 6 Field Div on August 1, as 41 Field Div on September 1, and as 3 Field Div on November 1. On January 1, 1959 it received its permanent designation of 5 Inf Division. It was at about this time that President Diem, fearing that ethnic minority units might have their own political agendas, ordered an infusion of Vietnamese officers and enlisted men, but the division retained a large percentage of Nungs. In November 1959 the original 34, 35, and 36 Inf Regts were redesignated 7, 8, and 9 Regts, respectively.

Riflemen of 9 Infantry Division wade through a Mekong Delta swamp. The shoulder patch is a one-third red over two-thirds medium blue shield, with white "9" superimposed on a blue barbed arrowhead. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

The division moved in May 1961 from Song Meo to Bien Hoa near Saigon, which 7 Div had vacated. Prior to this move a forward HQ had been established at Bien Hoa with two regiments, the rear HQ and 9 Inf Regt remaining at Song Meo. The division was heavily involved in the coup of November 1, 1963, which resulted in many senior officers being replaced. In July 1964 the division relocated to Phu Loi in Bien Long Province, from where it conducted operations in northern III CTZ and into adjacent Cambodia. It moved again in February 1970, to Lai Khe to take over a base vacated by the US 1st Inf Division.

7 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 10, 11, & 12 Inf Regts; 70, 71, 72, & 73 Arty Bns; 6 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 75.

In 1954 the ANV's *31e Groupe Mobile* was evacuated from the North to Da Nang; it was inactivated in December, and 31 Inf Div was activated on January 1, 1955. Headquartered in Tan Ky in the then Quang Nam Province (later renamed Quang Tie), it participated in Operation *Giai Phong*. At that date it had only 156 Inf Regt, so was loaned one from 32 Inf Div; later it received 51, 52, and 154 Inf Regiments. In mid-1955 the division transferred to Central Vietnam; on August 1, 1955 it was redesignated as 31 Field Div, and on September 1 as 11 Field Division. On November 1 it was renumbered 4 Field Div, with a new HQ at Bien Hoa near Saigon, and 51, 52, and 154 Inf Regts became 10, 11, and 12 Regts, respectively. On January 1, 1959 the division was finally redesignated as 7 Inf Division. In May 1961 the HQ was relocated to My Tho, and again in September 1969 to Dong Tam, formally occupied by the US 9th Inf Division. It continued to conduct operations in IV CTZ and along the Cambodian border.

9 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 14, 15, & 16 Inf Regts; 90, 91, 92, & 93 Arty Bns; 2 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 60.

In order to increase ARVN strength by 30,000 troops in 1962 two new divisions were raised, numbered 9 and 25. The former was activated on January 1, 1962 and completed its organization and training in August; cadres of leaders and troops were drawn from existing units and filled out with trainees. Its original 13, 14 and 15 Inf Regts were activated in March, April, and May 1962 (on March 1, 1967 the 13 Regt was redesignated 16 owing to the unlucky connotations of "13").

The first HQ was at My Thanh in Binh Dinh Province, and the area of operations included Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Phu Bon provinces. The deteriorating security situation in the Mekong Delta led to 9 Div's transfer to Sa Dac in Vinh Long Province in September 1963, when two regiments began operating in Vinh Binh and Kien Hoa provinces; 13 Regt was deployed to Kien Giang Province in October 1963. After deployment to the Delta the division conducted operations in just about every province in IV CTZ. In April 1970 elements participated in the Cambodia invasion, and continued such forays into 1972. In April 1972 the division HQ moved to the former US base at Vinh Long, and in mid-1972 its 15 Regt was deployed to MR III in a failed attempt to reopen National Highway 13 to An Loc during the NVA siege of that city.

10/18 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 18 Inf Div, 1974: 43, 48, & 52 Inf Regts; 180, 181, 182, & 183 Arty Bns; 5 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 27.

On May 16, 1965, 10 Inf Div was provisionally organized by consolidating the existing 43, 48 and 52 Independent Inf Regiments. The division was not formally activated until August 5, with HQ at Xuan Loc in Long Khanh Province east of Saigon; it operated mostly in eastern III CTZ, but also in other nearby provinces. It performed poorly, and suffered from severe morale problems. Commanders were relieved, efforts were made to improve the division's spirit, and on January 1, 1967 it was redesignated as 18 Inf Div; this was because of the unfavorable connotations of the slang expression "number ten," which implied something of the worst quality (as opposed to "number one," something of the highest quality). In mid-1972 its HQ served in An Loc during the NVA siege.

21 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 31, 32, & 33 Inf Regts; 210, 211, 212, & 213 Arty Bns; 9 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 51.

These infantrymen armed with 5.56mm M16A1 rifles wear standard fatigues, M1956 web gear, and jungle boots, and their M1 helmets bear a simple camouflage pattern of irregular black streaks. The "black rifle" began to be issued to high-priority units such as the 1st Infantry Division, Airborne, Marines and Rangers from October 1966, and became more widespread from early 1968, though only among ARVN infantry units that regularly saw combat.

Three infantry divisions were organized in 1959, to replace "light" and "field" divisions with standard infantry divisions of equal capabilities; 21 Div was organized around 11 Light Div, and absorbed assets of 13 Light Div on June 1, 1959.

The original 1 Light Div had been activated at Long Xuyen on August 1, 1955, with 11, 101, and 102 Inf Regts, but soon moved to Sa Bec. On November 1, 1955 it was redesignated 11 Light Div and the units became 31, 32, and 33 Regiments. This division's first combat was not against the VC but the Hoa Hao faction in the Delta, which was eliminated by early 1956. The 3 Light Div had been organized at Thu Dau Mot in Binh Duong Province on August 1, 1955, with 12, 15, and 106 Inf Regts, and soon moved to Tay Ninh. It became 13 Light Div on November 1, 1955, with the renumbered 37, 38, and 39 Regiments. When 21 Inf Div was activated in 1959 the assets of 11 and 13 Light Divs were consolidated, but 31, 32, and 33 Inf Regts of 11 Div were retained.

Division HQ was at Tay Ninh, but units operated in western III CTZ as well as IV CTZ. In November 1960 it sided with President Diem during an Airborne coup attempt. On February 14, 1963, 32 Inf Regt swapped designations with 48 Ind Inf Regt, the latter becoming 21 Div's new 32 Inf Regiment. The division HQ moved to Bac Lieu in 1963. In late 1970 a forward HQ was established in Ca Mau to support the 1970–72 U Minh Forest campaign. In April 1972 the entire division was redeployed to participate in the unsuccessful attempts to reopen National Highway 13 during the siege of An Loc. That July it returned to the Mekong; in 1973 it opened a new HQ at Vi Thaun in Chuong Thien Province, and continued to operate in the southern Delta.

Enlisted men of the Airborne Division, in their "rose-red" berets with embroidered badges. They wear on their left shoulders *fourragère* cords in the pale-blue-and-red ribbon colors of the French War Cross for Exterior Operations, marking two collective unit citations during the French Indochina War. The airborne units consisted entirely of volunteers and were given high-quality leadership; many distinguished *Nhay Du* commanders went on to lead other formations.

22 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 40, 41, 42, & 47 Inf Regts; 220, 221, 222, & 223 Arty Bns; 19 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 22.

Like 21 Div, this division was raised by consolidating two light divisions, in this case 12 and 14. The former was raised as 2 Light Div on August 1, 1955 at Kontum in the Central Highlands, with 103, 104, and 105 Inf Regts formed of battalions transferred from the Mekong Delta; on November 1 it was redesignated 12 Light Div, with 34, 35, and 36 Regiments. Similarly, 4 Light Div was raised on August 1, 1955 at Ban Me Thuot in Darlac Province; its 401, 402, and 403 Inf Regts were renumbered as 40, 41, and 42 when the division was redesignated 14 Light Div on November 1 that year. The HQ moved to Kontum in 1959.

The 12 Light Div was closed out on March 31, 1959, and the next day its assets and 14 Light Div became 22 Inf Div, with infantry regiments numbered 40, 41, and 42. Once reorganization and training were completed 22 Div was given responsibility for Kontum and Pleiku provinces. In March 1965 the HQ moved to Ba Gi and was assigned the coastal provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Phu Bon. In 1966, 47 Ind Inf Regt joined the division to replace 42 Inf Regt, which in late 1965 had been reassigned to 23 Inf Div (it would be reassigned again to 24 Special Tactical Zone, Kontum Province, on July 1, 1966; but on April 30, 1970, after that STZ was disbanded, the regiment would return to 22 Inf Division).

In early 1972 the division's 42 and 47 Inf Regts were operating in the Pleiku/Kontum area while 40 and 41 were in Binh Dinh; during the 1972 NVA offensive the division forward HQ was overrun at Tan Canh, and the battered division was concentrated at Binh Dinh for rebuilding. Late in 1972 the division reopened the highway through Binh Dinh, and in early 1973 it established its rear HQ at An Son, a former South Korean base.

23 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 43, 44, 45, & 53 Inf Regts; 230, 231, 232, & 233 Arty Bns; 8 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 33

This division was the successor of 15 Light Div, originally raised on August 1, 1955 at Nha Trang as 5 Light Div, with 404, 405, and 406 Inf Regiments. When the division was redesignated as 15 Light on November 1, 1955 its infantry regiments were renumbered 43, 44, and 45. Through the first half of 1956 the division helped defeat the militias of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects in the Mekong Delta, and also fought in Tay Ninh along the Cambodian border. It returned to Central Vietnam in August 1956, headquartered at Duc My.

On April 1, 1959, 15 Light Div was redesignated as 23 Inf Div, retaining its original regiments. In June 1961 the HQ moved to Ban Me Thuot and was responsible for eastern III CTZ (in 1963 this region became part of II CTZ). On October 16, 1965, 42 Inf Regt from 22 Div was transferred in; and on November 1, 43 Inf Regt was made independent and reassigned to III Corps (though it later returned), while 47 Ind Inf Regt was assigned to 23 Division. On July 1, 1966, 42 Inf Regt too was made independent, but the new 53 Inf Regt was not raised until August 1, 1968. From 1958–69 the division operated in the coastal provinces of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, and Bien Tuy, and in the Central Highlands. In May 1970 it took part in the Cambodia invasion. In May 1972 the division successfully defended Kontum after 22 Div was mauled; it remained in the Kontum/Pleiku area until it relocated to the southern Highlands in late 1973.

25 Infantry Division

Order of battle, 1974: 46, 49, & 50 Inf Regts; 250, 251, 252, & 253 Arty Bns; 10 Armd Cav Sqn; US Advisory Team 99

This was raised along with 9 Div on July 1, 1962, and was headquartered at Thuan Hoa in Quang Ngai Province, with 49, 50, and 51 Inf Regiments. It operated in that province and Binh Dinh until October 1964, when it relocated to Cay Diep west of Saigon, where elements had started deploying earlier in the year. Its 51 Inf Regt remained in Central Vietnam and became a separate regiment, 46 Ind Inf Regt being assigned in its place. Most of 25 Div's service thereafter was south and west of Saigon. In December 1964 the HQ moved to Duc Hoa in Hau Nghia Province, where it remained until December 1970, when it moved to Cu Chi in the same province, vacated by the US 25th Inf Division. A forward HQ was maintained at Tay Ninh West, another former US base. The division operated in the provinces along the Cambodian border, and took part in the April 1970 Cambodia invasion, which continued into 1971. In 1972 it took part in unsuccessful efforts to reopen National Highway 13 to An Loc.

Airborne Division

Order of battle, 1974:

1 Airborne Brigade: 1, 8, & 9 Abn Bns, 1 Abn Arty Bn
2 Abn Bde: 5, 7, & 11 Abn Bns, 2 Abn Arty Bn
3 Abn Bde: 2, 3, & 6 Abn Bns, 3 Abn Arty Bn
4 Abn Bde: 4 & 10 Abn Bns
Abn Recon, Signal, Support, & Medical Bns; Abn Engineer Co; US Abn Advisory Team 162

Vietnam's first airborne companies were established in 1948 and attached to French Colonial parachute battalions. Beginning in 1951, the French organized Vietnamese parachute battalions (*Tieu Doan Nhay Du,* TDND, or *Bataillons de Parachutistes Vietnamienne*, BPVN), and brigaded them with French Chasseur, Colonial and Foreign Legion para units in *Groupements Aéroportés* as part of the CEFEO general reserve. Along with some ethnic-minority units from the northern highlands, these were the most effective battalions in the ANV.

The Vietnamese JGS would continue to employ its airborne forces in the general reserve role. On May 1, 1955, the 1, 3, 5, and 6 Abn Bns plus

the Abn Support Bn were organized into the Abn Group (*Lien Doan Nhay Du*) based at Tan Son Nhut air base outside of Saigon, where its successor formations would remain. The group was expanded into the Abn Bde (*Lu Doan Nhay Du*) on December 1, 1959, with the addition of 7 and 8 Abn Bns, plus 1 and 2 Abn Task Force HQs (*Chien Doan Nhay Du*), and an artillery battalion. The Abn Div (*Su Doan Nhay Du*) was activated on December 1, 1965, numerous support and service units being raised along with 3 Abn TF. In 1969 the airborne TFs became brigades; an incomplete 4 Abn Bde was added in 1974.

The division or its elements fought in every part of South Vietnam over the years, both as reaction forces and conducting conventional ground operations.[7] They fought in Cambodia in 1970–71, and from mid-1972 in northern MR I.

A Ranger armed with an M2 carbine. Rangers and other corps-echelon units wore the red-on-white Roman numeral corps patch on their right shoulder (see Plate C1), here that of IV Corps in the far southwest.
Being light, compact, and having a very gentle recoil, the semiautomatic M1 and selective-fire M2 carbines, with both 15- and 30-round magazines, were among the most popular and widely-used weapons, despite their poor penetration and stopping-power. Although intended as a self-defense weapon for support and service personnel, before the advent of the M16A1 rifle these carbines were carried in large numbers by some infantry units in preference to the heavy, sharply-kicking Garand. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

RANGER COMMAND

The French had established a "commando" school at Nha Trang in 1951, training individuals who were returned to their units to pass on their skills. With the advent of US advisors in 1955 the school was remodeled after the US Army Ranger Course, and became the Ranger Training Center. The curriculum taught not only small-unit raider and recon skills, but served as a leadership course – as before, graduates returned to their units.

On February 15, 1960 President Diem, against the recommendation of US advisors, ordered that the 4th Company of each infantry battalion be detached and employed for special missions; in all, 32 companies were attached to MR commands and 18 to divisions. This reduced the strength and capabilities of battalions, and these now separated companies lacked any specialized training, doctrine or supporting infrastructure for new duties. By 1963 there were five companies in CTZ I, ten in CTZ II, 42 in CTZ III, 24 in CTZ IV, and five in the Capital Military District. The companies were designated by three-digit numbers, usually beginning with the CTZ number, although those in IV CTZ still began with "3" after its separation from III CTZ.

In an effort to salvage the situation and make these orphans useful, US advisors recommended that they be organized into commando (*Cam Tu*) and long range recon patrol (*Tram Sat*) companies. Combat-experienced officers and NCOs were encouraged to transfer to these Rangers, but the troops in the companies were not volunteers (though those who filled out the later battalions were). The companies were trained at My Duc, or by US mobile teams in the field. They still lacked any effective control, and were often misused by their parent commands.

To establish a degree of control the companies were concentrated into Ranger battalions and termed the

7 See Osprey Elite 29: *Vietnam Airborne*

ARMÉE NATIONALE VIETNAMIENNE, 1954–55

1: Rifleman

2: Light machine gunner

3: Platoon commander

ARVN INFANTRY, EARLY 1960s

1: Rifleman

2: Squad leader, 1st Infantry Division

3-11: Pre-1966 rank insignia – see text commentary for details

RANGERS
1: Grenadier
2: Staff sergeant
3–5: Insignia – see text commentary for details
1
2
3
4
5
3
35
Fujiera

AIRBORNE
1: Captain, 1966
2: Ammunition bearer
3–9: Insignia – see text commentary for details

3

4

5

2

1

6

7

8

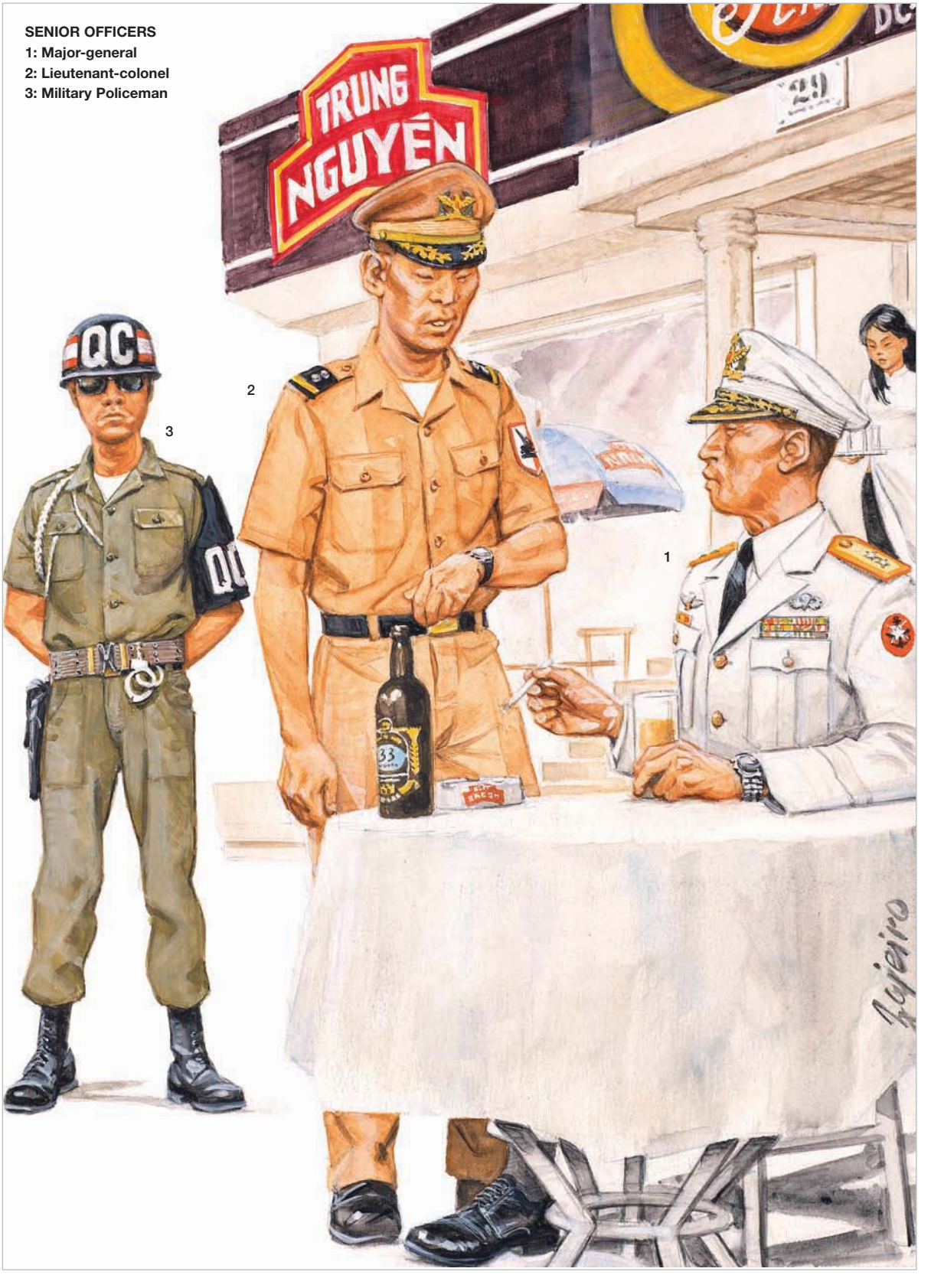
9

INFANTRY, LATE 1960s–EARLY 1970s
1: Machine gunner
2: Platoon commander
3: Canteen detail
4–6: 1966 rank insignia – see text commentary for details

ARMOR TROOPS
1: M113A1 and crew
2–4: Insignia – see text commentary for details

TERRITORIAL FORCES
1: People's Self-Defense Corps militiaman
2: Regional Force militiaman
3: NCO, National Police Field Force
4–7: Insignia – see text commentary for details

SENIOR OFFICERS
1: Major-general
2: Lieutenant-colonel
3: Military Policeman



Tieu Doan Biet Dong Quan (BDQ), Special Mobile Corps, which was established as a branch on July 1, 1960. The battalions were designated in the 20–50 series (though one was numbered 11). Battalions had four companies, lightly armed and equipped for mobile operations in difficult terrain, and trained to conduct both counter-insurgency and conventional light infantry missions. They were initially rotated through three Ranger training centers at Da Nang (MR I) and Nha Trang and Binh Thaun (both MR II), where unit training was conducted by Ranger-qualified US advisors. In January 1961 these facilities were consolidated into a single center at My Duc in MR II, which offered Ranger basic individual, unit, and recon training.[8]

Rangers sweep through a village. Each Ranger platoon had one M60 machine gun (left), with an additional one or two in the company weapons platoon. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

The battalions were mostly under corps control, often attached to divisions and provincial sectors, but the numbers of battalions made them difficult to control. In 1966/67 Ranger Groups 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (*Lien Doan 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 BDQ*) were organized with three battalions apiece, but up to three more could be attached; *Lien Doan 6 BDQ* was organized in 1968. The Ranger groups served as the corps' fire brigades, being especially useful for smaller-scale operations in difficult terrain, including urban areas.

In 1973, *Lien Doan 7 BDQ* was raised, and attached to the Airborne Division. In the meantime, US Special Forces had been withdrawn from Vietnam and the Civilian Irregular Defense Group and MIKE Forces disbanded in December 1970, along with the Vietnamese Special Forces that had worked with them. Many of the battalion-size CIDG camp strike forces were converted to Regional Force battalions, but 38 camps became Border Ranger battalions and transferred to the Ranger Command in May 1973 – eight in I CTZ, 12 in II CTZ, nine in III CTZ, and eight in IV CTZ. These units were designated in the 60–90 series, and continued their border security mission. At the same time a Ranger HQ was assigned to each corps, along with signal and service companies plus a mobile Ranger tactical command post.

In 1973 the Ranger groups were reorganized, with the Border Ranger battalions being incorporated into them even though the latter were not mobile units. Ranger Groups 11, 12, 14, and 15 were assigned to MR I, 21–25 to MR II, and 31–33 to MR III. Groups 4 and 6–8 were part of the General Reserve, the last being raised in 1974, followed by Group 9 in 1975. In April 1975, just days before the downfall of the Republic of Vietnam, 101 and 106 Ranger Divisions (*Su Dong BDQ*) were formed, but lacked supporting units. 101 Ranger Division was formed from 31–33 Ranger Groups and small collected units, and operated around Saigon; 106 Ranger Division is known only to have included 7 Ranger Group, to the southeast of Saigon.

8 BDQ battalions were not parachute-qualified. Only the 81 Airborne Ranger Bn was parachute-trained and under Vietnamese Special Forces control. It was redesignated 81 Airborne Ranger Group in December 1970, but was only an enlarged battalion with eight companies. They wore a green beret rather than BDQ maroon.

UNIT ORGANIZATION

Infantry

In theory all regiments were authorized a fourth battalion in 1965, but four of these – 4/15, 4/42, 4/43 and 2/52 – were activated only in 1967. ARVN regiments returned to a three-battalion structure in 1971, each of them receiving a fourth rifle company from the disbanded battalion. From 1966 high-priority regiments were assigned reconnaissance companies. It had been common practice for regiments to form special recruiting teams, bodyguard units, base security units, etc., and the recon companies were sometimes misused in this way, but some regiments made very aggressive use of them, committing them as strike units.

Infantry battalions had a headquarters company and four rifle companies prior to 1960 (when one was withdrawn to become a separate Ranger company), and in 1971 they again received a fourth company. A rifle company consisted of three rifle platoons each with three ten-man squads, plus a weapons platoon with machine-gun, mortar, and rocket-launcher sections. The headquarters company had service, medical, transportation and maintenance, mortar (4x 81mm), and recoilless rifle (4x 57mm) platoons, and a communications section.

Prior to receiving M16A1 rifles from *c.*1968, rifle platoons were armed with M1 rifles and M2 carbines, usually with more of the latter, and each rifle squad had one BAR. The company weapons platoon had two M1919A6 light machine guns, two 60mm mortars, and two 2.36in or later 3.5in bazookas. With the advent of the M16A1 the BAR was replaced by an M79 grenade-launcher and the M1919A6s by M60 machine guns. From the final US withdrawal in 1972 battalions in MR I – the most vulnerable northern provinces – might have four to eight jeep-mounted 106mm M40A1 recoilless rifles in the HQ company, and some regiments were assigned two or three M220 TOW antitank missiles.

While many factors must be considered in regards to complaints of poor ARVN performance, one that is seldom taken into account was the low ARVN manpower and equipment levels compared to equivalent US units. In 1970 a full-strength US infantry battalion was authorized 920 men; an ARVN four-company battalion had 639, and three-company battalions just 565, and due to manning shortages and the need to maintain rear elements only some 45–55 percent of these would actually be deployed to the field. General Westmoreland (Commanding General of MACV, June 1964–June 1968) set a goal for ARVN battalions to field a minimum of 450 troops for operations, or 70 percent of authorized strength. A comparison of weapons scales also underlines the obvious gulf in capabilities; an ARVN unit, even if blessed with good leadership and morale, could not be expected to perform as well as a larger and better-equipped US unit. It must be noted that the US battalion had four rifle companies as implemented in 1967, but

Rangers accompanied by a National Police Field Force officer (right) carry out a wounded VC. Even after they received M16A1 rifles many units still had pairs of .30cal M1919A4 or – as here – A6 machine guns in the company weapons platoon, rather than 7.62mm M60s. The M1919A6 differed from the M1919A4 in having a shoulder stock, carrying handle, lighter barrel, bipod, and muzzle flash suppressor. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

Vietnamese phonetic alphabet

Vietnamese is a tonal language and each letter can have up to five variations in pronunciation, which are defined by the proliferation of diacritical marks in the written language; there are also regional variations in pronunciation. There are 29 letters in the Romanized alphabet that was transcribed by early French missionaries from the original Chinese-based script. For clarity of radio and telephone communications, letters were spelled out using a phonetic alphabet based on (and using three of the same words as) the American phonetic alphabet. In voice transmission there was no means of specifying the diacritical/accent marks, but context and word order clarified the meaning.

A *anh-dung*	J juliet	S *son-tay*
B *bac-binh*	K *kinh-ky*	T *tu-tuong*
C *cai-cach*	L *le-loi*	U *ung-ho*
D *dong-da*	M *manh-me*	V *ve-vang*
E *e-de*	N *non-nonc*	W *wit-ki*
F foxtrot	O *oanh-liet*	X *xung-phong*
G *gay-go*	P *phu-quoc*	Y *yen-bai*
H *hong-ha*	Q *quang-trung*	Z zulu
I *im-lang*	R *rach-gia*	

the ARVN did not receive fourth companies until 1971; and that often neither battalion carried recoilless rifles (RRs) or bazookas into the field:

Weapons	US (4x Co)	ARVN (3x Co)
M16A1 rifle	841	565
M14 sniper rifle	24	0
M60 machine gun	26	6
M79 grenade-launcher	110	27
60mm M19 mortar	0	6
81mm M29 mortar	12	4
4.2in M30 mortar	4	0
57mm M18A1 RR	0	4
90mm M67 RR	12	0
3.5in M20A1 bazooka	0	6

Artillery

The amount and caliber of artillery available to the ARVN was steadily increased through the war, but it was often misused. Battalions were broken up, with batteries and two-gun platoons scattered between sector and sub-sector headquarters and small outposts for protective fires. This dispersal made centralized, coordinated fire control and the massing of fires difficult if not impossible, and infantry conducting offensive operations were often insufficiently supported. In the early days some efforts were made to use US helicopters to airlift artillery to forward positions to provide concentrated support, but these assets were limited. In time more artillery units were authorized, and to prevent battalions from being splintered scores of separate 105mm howitzer platoons were raised to be emplaced in outposts and bases.

The early divisions had only one battalion of 105mm howitzers and another of 4.2in mortars,

A second lieutenant, and a radio operator using an AN/PRC-10 backpack radio. Note the *Thieu Uy*'s rank insignia on his shirt front opening, and the semi-stiff field cap (see Plate B1); the radioman wears only the liner of his steel helmet. The ARVN's first radios were a generation behind those of US forces; weaker in technically-proficient manpower, the ARVN also found these more difficult to operate and maintain. Even after the equipment was upgraded, the disparity in the scales of issue to US and ARVN units was as significant as that in weapons strength. A US infantry battalion had 132 radios (plus 180 seldom-used helmet-mounted AN/PRT-4 and AN/PRR-9 units for intra-platoon comms). A *Tieu Doan Bo Binh* had only 55: 18x AN/PRC-6 walkie-talkies, 32x AN/PRC-25 backpacked (85x in a US battalion), and five AN/GRC-87 jeep-mounted sets. The dearth of "prick 25s," vital for platoon and company operations, greatly hampered command and control, unit responsiveness, the directing of fire support, and the coordination of logistics.

The Airborne Division included three 105mm howitzer battalions; initially they used M101A1s with the shield removed, but late in the war received lighter-weight M102 howitzers.
Vietnamese troops were reported to make exceptional artillerymen, and ARVN artillery support overall was considered good when it could be effectively massed and coordinated. However, there were problems with maintenance, outdated fire control procedures, and the inconsistent quality of forward observers, and thus a heavy reliance on US artillery and air support. The American withdrawal in 1972 left a serious fire-support shortfall even though additional units were activated. Increasing use of 122mm and 130mm artillery by the NVA became a serious threat, as they outranged many ARVN pieces. In the 1970s great amounts of artillery were lost to NVA offensives; endangered bases were successfully evacuated, often by airlift, but the guns had to be left behind. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

with three batteries apiece; 105mm batteries had four guns, and 4.2in batteries nine tubes. In theory each battalion of an infantry regiment was supported by a three-mortar platoon, but the 4.2in was too short-ranged to provide effective support from a firebase, and was mainly used for base defense. In 1963 both types of battery were standardized with six weapons; finally, in 1964/65 the mortars were replaced with howitzers. By the end of the 1960s each division had three 105mm battalions of M101A1 howitzers plus one of 155mm M114A1s for general support.

In the mid-1960s each corps artillery had two 105mm battalions, except I and II CTZ which had one each of 105s and 155s. By 1969 the corps artillery had a total of six 155mm and two 105mm battalions, and by the end of 1970 there were seven 105mm and five 155mm battalions assigned to corps artillery, plus two battalions (numbered 101 and 104, each with three four-gun batteries) with M107 self-propelled 175mm guns undergoing training. Additionally, there were 100 sector artillery platoons of 105s, with 53 deployed. A year later there were only five 105mm, four 155mm, and two (later three) 175mm battalions (101, 104, 105) assigned to corps; two battalions from I Corps had been reassigned to the new 3 Inf Div. There were by then 100 operational sector platoons, with 35 more in training.

Armor Corps

Many senior American officers felt there was little need or operational scope for armor in Vietnam, given the terrain, and the nature of the counter-insurgency and low-level conventional battles. This analysis proved faulty, since many areas provided suitable terrain for armor to maneuver. How armor should best be employed was another question, however: offensively was the preferred method, even if on a smaller scale than was usual for armor formations. Tanks and other AFVs were also useful for convoy escort, reaction and relief forces, reconnaissance-in-force, line-of-communications security, and base defense. Unfortunately they were all too often employed in the last two roles, which saw them used as "mobile pillboxes" without taking advantage of their mobility, firepower, and shock effect.

When the French departed they left much of their Lend-Lease US light armor to equip the early ARVN units. This included M3A1 halftracks, M3A1 White scout cars, 37mm gun-armed M8 armored cars, and 75mm M8 self-propelled howitzers, plus some French 47mm gun-armed Panhard AMD 178B armored cars. The ARVN retained the French system of mounted-unit designations. In US service an

armored cavalry regiment comprised battalion-sized squadrons, with company-sized troops divided into platoons. In the European system a mounted regiment was of battalion size, composed of company-sized squadrons made up of platoon-sized troops. In late 1955 there were four ARVN armored regiments, each consisting of an HQ squadron and three recon squadrons. The office of Chief of Armor was opened on April 1, 1955 to supervise the formation and training of units, and development of doctrine, equipment, and the Armor School. The Armor Corps was established in early 1956, and the regiments were reorganized under American influence, although retaining the French-style designations. The new 1957 regiments each had two recon squadrons with much the same vehicles as before (the M8 SP howitzers were withdrawn), plus a squadron of 75mm gun-armed M24 Chaffee light tanks. These AFVs remained in use into the 1960s.

In April 1962 two mechanized rifle companies equipped with the M113A1 armored personnel carrier were organized, and attached to 7 and 21 Inf Divs as an experiment. Although they experienced teething problems due to the poor training of the selected troops, the initiative was judged successful, and these two companies became 4 and 5 Mech Rifle Sqns of 2 Armd Cav Regiment. They were modeled roughly on US mechanized rifle companies, with three rifle troops (platoons) each with three rather than four APCs, and a support troop with four APCs, three 60mm mortars, and three 3.5in bazookas, plus two APCs in the headquarters. It was found that the squadrons could not effectively employ traditional US mechanized tactics in which the troops dismounted from the APCs and attacked on foot. Attacks became bogged down, the APCs could not always position themselves for effective fire support, and the light mortars and bazookas proved to be too short-ranged.

In late 1962 each of the corps' armored cavalry regiments was ordered reorganized, and this was accomplished by May 1963. While retaining one M8 armored car recon squadron and the M24 tank squadron, the regiment also received two M113-equipped rifle squadrons each with 15 APCs, and a second recon squadron with M114 light recon vehicles (this smaller version of the M113 quickly proved unequal to the terrain, and between April and November 1964 they were replaced with M113s.) At the same time the bazookas and light mortars were replaced by longer-ranged 57mm recoilless rifles and 81mm mortars; the mortars might fire dismounted, or from expedient mounts fitted inside M113s.

In December 1963, 5 Armor Group and 6 Mech Battle Grp were raised and assigned to the JGS General Reserve; the former was created by drawing tank squadrons from other regiments, making it the first true all-tank unit. Later these two battalion-size

By 1974 the Armor Corps fielded three battalions with 90mm gun-armed M48A3 tanks. While intended for mobile operations near the DMZ, they were sometimes used more as "rolling forts," with the turrets covered with sandbags held in place by chicken-wire mesh the better to withstand ambushes and close-in infantry attacks. Behind the foreground tank is an M113 APC (see also Plate F), which was modified innovatively by the ARVN. It was they who first fitted shields for the cupola machine gun, and added two .30cal or 7.62mm guns to be fired from the cargo hatch, as copied on the US Armored Cavalry Assault Vehicle (ACAV). The Vietnamese tried out different APC-mounted weapons, including 20mm automatic cannon, 57mm and 106mm recoilless rifles, and 2.75in helicopter rocket pods, and some units received M132A1 mechanized flamethrowers.

groups were reorganized like the other armored cavalry regiments. From January 1965 the M24 Chaffee began to be replaced with the much more capable 76mm gun-armed M41A3 Walker Bulldog.

In early 1965 it was decided to add additional mechanized rifle squadrons and to raise armored cavalry squadrons for the infantry divisions, and this was accomplished by mid-1966, with M113s replacing the obsolete M8 armored cars. A separate squadron and ten separate troops were organized for convoy escort, freeing the armored cavalry regiments for more aggressive missions. These escort units were equipped with Commando V-100 four-wheel armored cars; the armored car troop of the armored cavalry regiment's HQ squadron received six V-100s in 1967.

The Vietnamese employed M113s more as light tanks than as carriers from which infantry dismounted to fight. In 1967/68 five rather than three M113s were assigned to each rifle troop (platoon), thus increasing squadron strength to 22 APCs, and these were manned by a seven-man crew rather than a squad. M125A1 mortar carriers were provided for the 81mm tubes.

In the early 1960s there were repeated complaints about the lack of aggressiveness of some ARVN armor units. All too often they were held at corps and province headquarters for defense rather than operating offensively; they became known as "palace guards" or "coup troops," and their AFVs as "voting machines." However, from the 1968 Tet Offensive armor units began to be employed aggressively, and developed good reputations (even from the early days they were known for their superior maintenance practices.)

In 1971, 20 Tank Bn was organized with 90mm gun-armed M48A3 tanks and stationed on the DMZ with 3 Division. By 1974 it was joined by the similarly equipped 21 and 22 Bns, all three assigned to I Corps' 1st Armd Brigade.

TERRITORIAL FORCES

Various territorial forces distinct from the National Army – and of very mixed character – had existed since 1948, and continuing this doctrine under local commanders was an essential part of the RVN strategy. They were not simply local security troops, but could augment ARVN operations, and participate in civic action programs to help win the populace over to the government's side. In this latter role they were not always effective.

In addition to a **Self-Defense Corps** for village self-defense, in April 1955 the territorial units in the new South Vietnam were organized into the **Civil Guard** (CG – *Bao An*) under the Interior Ministry, for local law and order, security, and civic action. In reality these battalions and companies answered to the province chiefs, but from 1960 the ARVN made major efforts to improve their capabilities. Additional training centers were opened, and US training teams fanned out to instruct existing CG units at their home stations; CG recruits received 12 weeks' training and SDC militiamen six weeks.

In 1964 the CG became the **Regional Force** (RF – *Dia Phuong Quan*), and the expanded SDC the **Popular Force** (PF – *Nghia Quan*), resulting in the collective acronym RF/PF or "Ruff-Puffs." More effort was made

US Marine NCOs inspect Popular Force troops; in I CTZ many of the PF units were advised by the US Marines under the Combined Action Battalion program. Unusually for the ARVN, such units were often armed with 7.62mm M14 rifles provided by the Marines when they converted to the M16A1. Otherwise only a few ARVN troops, including some Ranger units, had a proportion of M14s and automatic M14A1s, but no unit was completely armed with them.

to train and better organize what had previously been little better than armed bands and private armies, but while integrated into the ARVN structure under an RF/PF Command they were still under the tactical control of provincial and district chiefs. The RF/PF were intended to operate only in their home provinces and districts; they might conduct joint operations with regulars, but these were limited in scope and duration. In 1966 the RF/PF Command was disbanded, and thereafter they were supervised by the ARVN deputy commanding general. RF company groups began to be organized in 1969, each to control two to six companies as required for operations. Experimental battalions were also formed, and by 1969 there were 232 company groups and 31 battalions. RF battalions were designated, for example, *Tieu Doan 48 Dia Phuong Quan,* and a company as e.g. *Dai Doi 763 Dia Phuong Quan.*

In October 1970 the RF/PF was integrated into the ARVN as part of the infantry, though still limited to operating in their home areas. By 1973 the company groups had been converted to battalions, of which there were 360. There were cases of higher-quality RF units being absorbed into regular infantry regiments. To further relieve the regulars of security duties, RF mobile groups were formed in the restored MR III and IV, each with three battalions and a four-gun 105mm battery; in 1975 there were 27 such groups.

The **People's Self-Defense Force** (PSDF – *Nhan Dan Tu Ve*) was instituted after the 1968 Tet Offensive, when villagers asked the government for the means to defend themselves. Its part-time platoons and squads were comprised of local volunteers with obsolete small arms and no uniforms; one squad was authorized per 1,000 inhabitants.

By the end of 1964 there were 533 RF companies; in 1967, 888 companies; in 1968, 1,119 companies; and in 1969, 1,471 companies. By 1975 there were 312,000 RF troops in 1,810 companies, 24 river-boat companies, and 51 mechanized platoons with V-100 armored cars, plus service units. At the same time there were 220,800 PF in 7,968 platoons. To put in perspective just how large a force the RF was, in 1974 the 11 ARVN infantry divisions, with additional regiments and battalions in some, fielded a total of 436 rifle companies.

THE ARVN SOLDIER

The Vietnamese are as diverse as any other society, and soldiers were conscripted from all walks of life, ranging from illiterate peasants from deep in the countryside to educated city boys. Their attitudes towards the war ranged from staunch support to apathy. Draft-dodging was common; the Vietnamese had a long culture of concealing personal identity, and weaknesses in the registration system made this easy. There were incidents of literal press-ganging by the Military Police. Originally the draft meant four years' service, but from 1965, with the war escalating, few able-bodied men were discharged after fulfilling this term – they were in for the duration. Later, men in their late 30s were discharged after service, with many going into the expanding RF/PF.

The draft age was 20–25, and, as in any other undeveloped country, that was the first time that many Vietnamese had ever traveled outside their immediate home areas or had to deal with young men of other classes and from different regions. Since time out of mind rural Vietnamese loyalties had been rooted in family and village, beyond which most had little interest. The central government, regardless of its politics, was perceived as doing nothing for them, simply demanding taxes and taking their young men for the military. Nevertheless, 18- and 19-year-olds could volunteer, and there were more genuine volunteers than many people realize. This varied over time, but many volunteered after experiencing local atrocities by the VC, and others simply to escape unemployment. In 1968 the draft age was extended to 18–38, but few men over 30 were actually taken. The RF/PF was open to boys of 17 and men of 31–38, and to some between those age groups who were physically disqualified for regular service. Many in the RF/PF had former regular service, having been discharged routinely or due to wounds, injuries, or illness.

The quality and duration of ARVN training varied over time; basic instruction was conducted at regional training centers and generally lasted 12 weeks, but this was reduced to nine weeks during the general mobilization following the 1968 Tet Offensive. Specialists were sent to branch technical schools, where the quality of instruction, assisted by US advisors, was generally good. The students were selected from those with more than basic education; this meant that the support units, to include armor, artillery, and engineers, were manned mostly by city-dwellers, and infantry units by rural draftees. This was beneficial, in that the latter were more accustomed to the forests, swamps, and mountains.

Infantry armed with M16A1 rifles move through a shell-blasted area. Note that the .30cal machine gun belts are carried with the bullet points outwards, to keep them from digging into the neck. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

Officers

A major problem was the nature of much of the officer class, who were drawn from the families of businessmen and landowners and were educated in the French tradition – many in France itself. This meant that they were well off financially, and Roman Catholic in upbringing, while their NCOs and soldiers were Buddhist

peasants and workers, poorly educated and raised in the village tradition. The ways of their troops were often as incomprehensible to the Vietnamese officers as they were to Americans, and they showed little concern for their men's wellbeing. Officers seldom made sincere and realistic efforts to "win the hearts and minds" of the population; class divergence was too wide, and soldiers from any region of Vietnam had little empathy for strangers.

There were officers who avoided going into harm's way, or even field service in any capacity. Such men were more concerned with the tailoring of their uniforms than with learning their trade; formed by their privileged upbringing, their work ethic was questionable at best. This said, it must be emphasized that there were a good many capable, motivated, and dedicated officers, who did the best they could within a system that often hampered their efforts and disregarded their sacrifices. Anyone with some university education or even a high school equivalent was often sent for officer training. There were some officers from the lower classes, even a few from ethnic minority groups, but they were few in number and seldom rose above the company grades; the same was true of some young, experienced NCOs who were also commissioned. Despite the severe shortages of officers and NCOs, pay was low and promotions extremely slow, and more often based on time-in-service than merit. Officers commanding units were more often than not a grade or two lower than the authorized rank; colonels instead of major-generals might command divisions, and battalions were frequently led by captains rather than lieutenant-colonels.

A wounded soldier of 37 Ranger Bn is treated in a frontline trench on the eastern perimeter of Khe Sanh Combat Base, 1968. Note the M79 grenade-launcher and M60 machine gun in the background, and the radio operator carrying an AN/PRC-25. Helmet finishes include camouflage-painted but with the full-color Ranger insignia, cloth camouflage covers, and plain olive drab paint. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

While the ARVN as a whole are often accused of apathy in the defense of their country, there are many examples of dedicated officers and men. Thousands volunteered for the Airborne, Rangers, Special Forces, and Marines, as well as for the recon companies and other special units with dangerous roles, and such men were also found in regular infantry units. The Airborne, Rangers, Marines, and Special Forces received higher pay than other regulars, as they were deployable nationwide and separated from their families for long periods; conversely, the RF/PF received even lower pay, since they remained close to home.

Morale was a serious problem in many units, since the rankers often had reason to distrust their officers. Not merely careless of the welfare of their troops, these remote products of an alien caste sometimes actively exploited them – loaning money at exorbitant interest, charging for rations, taking bribes to allow them unauthorized leave, and so forth. In 1968 efforts were made to improve the troops' wellbeing and morale, by providing more and better family housing, and by establishing post exchanges and commissaries to provide them and their families with lower-cost goods at a time when inflation was high. These efforts succeeded in cutting desertion rates by half, to 9.5 per thousand. In fact,

Tet counter-offensive, February 1968: a young boy points out VC positions to a Ranger during street fighting. While ARVN treatment of civilians was often harsh, this was not always the case, and especially later in the war. During the Tet campaign, when a ruthless enemy brought the war to their very homes, it was common for civilians to assist the ARVN by identifying VC positions, serving as guides through the back streets and alleys, carrying ammunition, evacuating the wounded, and providing food and water. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

most desertions were temporary and due to homesickness, the need to deal with family problems or to help bring in the harvest, or the arrival of children. Most deserters returned of their own accord, and faced only minimal punishment.

* * *

If provided with effective leaders and adequate fire support, ARVN soldiers were as good as any in Asia. They were generally well equipped, and were particularly effective when US artillery and air support was available. The ARVN soldier demonstrated his qualities well during the costly 1968 Tet Counter-Offensive, and the defeat of the 1972 NVA Easter Offensive in the northern provinces; sadly, he was all too often failed by his higher command and by the politicians he fought for.

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Tet, 1968: Airborne Division troops fight their way into the strongly defended Hue Citadel. Two of the forward men carry AN/PRC-10 radios with ponchos strapped to them. The man to the right wears a rain jacket privately made from poncho material, with copious pockets for 20-round M16 magazines. The lighter weight of the 5.56mm ammunition allowed ARVN infantry to carry it in greater quantity than the previous .30cal (7.62mm) rifle clips. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: *ARMÉE NATIONALE VIETNAMIENNE*, 1954-55

The ANV was largely armed and equipped from old French stocks. The US MAAG had been supplying US weapons specifically intended for the ANV since 1951/52, but the French often diverted these for CEFEO use; nevertheless, some – e.g. M1 carbines, Thompson SMGs, BARs, and .30cal M1919A4 and A6 light machine guns – were issued.

A1: Rifleman

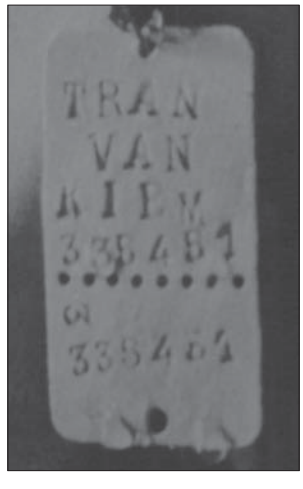
This infantryman wears a locally-made French cotton bush hat, and the all-arms M1947 *treillis de combat* in its "lightened" form; the two-pocket shirt has doubled shoulder reinforcement, external pocket flaps and a fly front, and the trousers have cargo pockets. They are bloused here into French M1945 web anklets (similar to British 37 Pattern but with an upper strap only), over blackened M1917 hobnailed boots – the smallest two sizes in stores were reserved for Vietnamese personnel. His old-fashioned equipment comprises the French brown leather M1903/14 belt, M1892 Y-strap suspenders, and two M1916 ammo pouches; an M1935 musette and canteen are slung to hang at his hips. The rifle is the standard French Army 7.5mm MAS 36, with a five-round fixed magazine loading from stripper clips; a needle-bayonet fitted beneath the barrel and was housed reversed inside the forestock when not fixed. A yellow-painted French OF 37 offensive grenade is clipped to his belt; the higher-fragmentation defensive DF 37 had the same "scent-bottle" case but with the lower half painted dark red.

A2: Light machine gunner

This soldier wears the same uniform – whose exact shades of green drab varied widely – with the addition of a US M1 steel helmet. By now some French airborne troops' pattern TAP50 web equipment was available, here the belt and the US-style canteen and carrier – the canteen had a wider neck than the original. He is armed with the 7.5mm FM 1924/29 light machine gun; one was supposed to be issued per squad, but usually only one or two were available per platoon. (This effective LMG was rather massive for a slightly-built Vietnamese: it might measure 70 percent of his height, and weigh 20 percent of his body weight – the equivalent of a weapon 4ft 2in long and weighing 36lb for a 6ft, 180lb American.) The special French haversack for its magazines was not routinely issued. Magazine pouches for all automatic weapons were in short supply throughout the French Indochina War, and many varying models were locally made up from canvas or leather; this example holds only two of the 25-round magazines.

A3: Platoon commander

This junior officer has acquired a French airborne troops' M1947 green drab *veste de saut* and US "double-buckle" boots, worn with the all-arms fatigue trousers. Note the single gold plum-blossom rank insignia of a *Thieu Uy* (second lieutenant) pinned to the left breast pocket flap. His



An early ARVN identification tag, similar to the French type, for a soldier named Tran Van Kiem; the topmost line is the family or clan name, of which there were far fewer than are found among the populations of Western countries. If the soldier was killed the bottom portion was broken off and handed in to the company headquarters; later, US-style duplicated dog tags were used. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

A Ranger second lieutenant speaks on an AN/PRC-10 radio; the grip of a privately purchased fighting knife can be seen on his web suspender. The gold-and-black "Ranger" tab above the BDQ sleeve patch – see Plate C – identifies him as a graduate of the US Army's Ranger Course at My Duc. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

main weapon is the 9mm MAT 49 submachine gun, with a telescoping stock and 32-round magazine. Again, he carries magazines in a locally-made leather belt pouch. Pistols were seldom issued to junior officers, but were felt to confer prestige; this man has acquired a 7.65mm MAS 35S.
(Inset) Badge of 5th Bn, 3rd Foreign Infantry Regt, Foreign Legion (V/3e REI); North Vietnam, 1951–53. This represents the early transitional period when locally raised Vietnamese units were incorporated for "on-the-job training" into regiments of the Far East Expeditionary Corps, with large French cadres. From winter 1952/53 they began to be separated as units of the ANV, with much reduced or no French cadres – in this case, becoming *Tieu Doan 76*.

B: ARVN INFANTRY, EARLY 1960s

In the late 1950s US uniforms, equipment and weapons began to be issued, and the ARVN soldier began to take on a more American appearance, although French influence remained in some headgear, in unit and rank insignia and decorations. Unit or formation patches were generally worn not at the top of the sleeve as in US practice, but about 5cm (2in) below the shoulder of the left sleeve; enlisted rank was worn just below any patch, also on the left sleeve only.

B1: Rifleman

This *Khin Binh* wears indigenously-made fatigues, with an unusual semi-stiff field cap that only saw limited use; it had ear flaps that folded up inside – useful in the mountains. He is armed with the then-standard .30cal M1 Garand rifle, and wears US World War II surplus web gear. It was common practice to slip eight-round Garand clips onto the suspenders for quick access.

B2: Squad leader, 1st Infantry Division

He wears the US-produced but Asian-sized version of the US olive green fatigues and combat boots; the Vietnamese produced similar uniforms but in a lighter fabric. This field cap, shaped by a black vinyl internal sweatband, was the characteristic ARVN type throughout the war. He displays on his left sleeve the white-and-blue divisional patch, and the white-over-yellow rank chevrons of a *Ha Si Nhat* (though enlisted men did not usually wear rank in the field.) Many units were armed almost throughout with US carbines. His basically US web gear incorporates both French TAP50 suspenders, and US two-pocket pouches for 15-round carbine magazines locally modified by the French with D-rings to attach to the suspenders.

Pre-1966 rank insignia

B3: General officers were distinguished by 5 to 1 silver stars: *Thuong Tuan*g, superior general (US equivalent, general of the Army); *Dai Tuong*, senior general (general – **illustrated**); *Trung Tuong,* intermediate general (lieutenant-general); *Thieu Tuong*, junior general (major-general); and *Chuan Tuong,* sub-general (brigadier-general).
B4: Field officers displayed 3 to 1 silver plum-blossoms: *Dat Ta,* senior grade superior officer (colonel – **illustrated**); *Trung Ta*, intermediate grade superior officer (lieutenant-colonel); and *Thieu Ta***,** junior grade superior officer (major).
B5: Company officers wore 3 to 1 gold plum-blossoms: *Dai Uy*, senior grade junior officer (captain); *Trung Uy,* intermediate grade junior officer (first lieutenant – **illustrated**); and *Thieu Uy,* junior grade junior officer (second lieutenant).
B6: *Chuan Juy,* student officer (officer cadet) wore a gold disc with this character raised in gold; *Sinh Vien Si Quan*, student officer candidate, wore the insignia **illustrated**.
B7: The **"senior superior NCO" grades** wore single metal disc insignia: the *Thuong Si Nhat* (sergeant-major – **illustrated**) in gold, and the *Thuong Si* (first sergeant) in silver.
B8: Next in seniority were the **NCO grades**: *Trung Si Nhat*, senior grade NCO (sergeant first class – **illustrated**) with 3 silver/white chevrons, and the *Trung Si*, intermediate grade NCO (staff sergeant), with a single chevron.
B9: The *Ha Si Nhat*, junior grade NCO (sergeant – **illustrated**) wore one silver/white chevron over two gold/yellow.
B10: Next in seniority was the *Ha Si,* low grade NCO (corporal – **illustrated**), who wore two gold/yellow chevrons.
B11: The lowest grade to display rank was the *Binh Nhat*, private first class – **illustrated** – with one gold/yellow chevron. Below this the grades were *Binh Nhi*, private second class, and *Trung Dinh,* "able bodied man" or recruit.

C: RANGERS

The *Biet Dong Quan* wore their own camouflage uniforms; a maroon beret with a distinctive badge; a Ranger qualification badge on the right breast of service dress; and a BDQ left sleeve patch, sometimes with group and battalion identification (see C3).

C1: Grenadier

This Ranger wears camouflage fatigues in the so-called "duck hunter" or "frog" pattern, and note that Rangers typically wore the regional corps patch on their right sleeve. Many units painted their helmets with a large, full-color version of the BDQ's black-panther-and-star sleeve patch device, and a gaudy and far from "camouflage" pattern of black and yellow striping (as C2); others used a subdued camouflage pattern, or a cloth camouflage cover. The M1952A body armor was widely issued to units fighting in Saigon during the 1968 Tet Offensive; it is worn here over US M1956 web gear. This Ranger is armed with the M79 40mm grenade-launcher, and carries rounds for it in his M14 rifle ammo pouches and a separate bandolier.

C2: Staff sergeant

This NCO wears fatigues in the BDQ's distinctive camouflage pattern, though it was not uncommon for a single unit to wear a mix of uniforms; a field cap and a beret made in this pattern of fabric were also seen. This *Trung Si* sports a "tiger-striped" helmet, and one of the red bandanas commonly worn by Rangers; under the circumstances the subdued black format of his single rank chevron, just visible below the BDQ left sleeve shield, seems pointless. (In subdued form the white stripes were in black and the yellow stripes in olive green). He too wears M1956 web gear, and is armed with an M16A1 rifle. Note his jungle boots, and the rucksack that he has just shucked off. This is the US-made type at first designed specifically for the BDQ, but later adopted throughout the ARVN. It was variously known as the "ranger pack," "indigenous rucksack" or "ARVN rucksack"; it is not to be confused with the even less costly "indigenous rucksack" used by the CIDG.

C3: The BDQ left sleeve patch was sometimes worn with a tab identifying (left) the parent Ranger group, and (right) the battalion.

C4: The BDQ cap badge, as worn on a maroon beret.

C5: The BDQ qualification badge, worn on the right breast above the pocket.

D: AIRBORNE

The ARVN airborne formation wore distinctive camouflage uniforms based on French original designs both in cut and camouflage patterns. The *Nhay Du* tended to adhere to French practices more than conventional units, owing to their inheritance of the proud French *aéroporté* traditions in the battles of the mid-1950s. The distinctive headgear was the rose-red beret (*beré do tuoi*); like most other ARVN berets it was worn pulled to the left with the badge over the right temple, in French style.

D1: Captain, 1966

This Airborne Division officer wears the red beret, and standard airborne camouflage shirt and trousers of French cut, in a pattern originally traceable to the British World War II "windproofs" supplied as surplus to the French Airborne in Indochina. The formation patch is worn, unusually, at the very top of the left sleeve. Battalion patches were often worn on the right breast pocket – here that of 5th Abn Bn (*TD5ND*), whose original formation had been wiped out fighting to the last at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 but had been rebuilt that August. Golden-yellow embroidered captain's rank insignia are attached to the left edge of the shirt's front opening as in French practice. Jumpwings are displayed on his right chest, and on his left pocket the jump designator badge, indicating that he is assigned to a unit on jump status. He carries a .38cal Colt Detective Special snub-nose revolver in a shoulder holster. The standard ARVN handgun was the .45cal Colt M1911A1, but few pistols were issued even if equipment tables authorized them – they were too easily lost or pilfered. However, they were considered a sign of office by commanders, and many officers purchased .38 Special Colt and Smith & Wesson revolvers or various makes of 9mm pistols.

D2: Ammunition bearer

This soldier wears a uniform cut in the style of US jungle fatigues; it and the helmet cover are in two different camouflage patterns, the latter of "streaky" French appearance. His web gear is the M1956, and besides his M16A1 rifle he has an M72 LAW (light antitank weapon) – issued to the ARVN in large numbers, as were M18A1 Claymore mines. He carries a 250-round .30cal machine-gun ammo can at each end of a bamboo shoulder pole.

An Airborne Division paratrooper scrambles though Saigon ruins carrying a wounded VC prisoner. The winged sword unit jump designator badge can be seen on his left pocket – see Plate D5. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

D3: Airborne beret badge

D4: Jumpwings

D5: Jump designator

D6: 5th Airborne Battalion pocket patch

D7: Airborne Group shoulder patch (May 1955)

D8: Airborne Brigade shoulder patch (December 1959)

D9: Airborne Division shoulder patch (December 1965)

E: INFANTRY, LATE 1960s-EARLY 1970s

E1: Machine gunner

Vietnamese OG fatigue uniforms came into use in the late 1960s. Designs varied; it was not uncommon for soldiers to have tailors convert their fatigue shirts to short-sleeve, and while mostly worn in garrison these were also seen in the field. This M60 machine gunner wears an OG "boonie hat" with such a shirt, of a version with single central pocket buttons; as on Plates C and D, note the characteristic slim cut of the trousers. The cardboard carton slung round his body in a bandolier pouch holds a single 100-round belt of 7.62mm ammunition for the M60 machine gun, and the M9 ammo can that he carries holds two of these bandoliers. The "Number 60," issued to high-priority units from the late 1960s on a scale of two per infantry company weapons platoon, was 9lb lighter than the formerly issued M1919A6.

E2: Platoon commander

This aspirant (see commentary to E5 below) wears an M1 helmet roughly camouflaged with streaks of black paint, and

A major of the Airborne Division gives water to a VC casualty. From 1966 field-grade officers displayed a gold bar beneath the silver blossoms of their rank insignia – see Plate E4. Rank insignia might be full-color metal or embroidered, or black metal or embroidered. They could be seen displayed on the collars, as here; on slip-on loops on the epaulets (if present), on the left pocket flap, or on the left edge of the shirt front opening, between the second and third buttons. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

a fatigue shirt with epaulets, two-button pocket flaps, and an added pen/pencil pocket on the upper left sleeve. The white-on-black name tag above the right pocket ("PHUNG") is almost hidden here by his M1956 web gear, but note black subdued rank insignia on both collars. He carries US M16 binoculars, and the now-standard M16A1 rifle.

E3: Detail of canteen

As well as US-issue 1-quart plastic canteens, the ARVN were also supplied with this US-made type bearing a Vietnamese version of the same molded warning as the original – "DO NOT APPLY CANTEEN TO OPEN FLAME OR BURNER PLATES." Like other items of ARVN equipment, it is also marked "Q.L.V.N." for *Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa* – Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

E4–E6: 1966 rank insignia (compare with B4–B9):

In 1966 rank insignia were changed for field-grade officers, officer cadets and candidate cadets, and superior-grade NCOs, and there were some title changes for enlisted ranks. The format of the five silver stars for *Thuong Tuang*, superior general, was altered from a line into a star-shape similar to the US insignia for general of the army. The insignia for the three field-grade officer ranks – 3, 2 and 1 silver blossoms – each acquired an added gold bar to make them more distinguishable from those of company officers when in subdued form; **E4** illustrates that of *Trung Ta,* intermediate superior officer (US, lieutenant-colonel).

The rank of *Chuen Tuong,* aspirant (sometimes called "third lieutenant" by Americans) was created immediately above that of *Chuan Uy,* officer cadet. When a cadet graduated from the Military Academy at Dalat he was assigned as an aspirant to command a platoon in the field, before being commissioned as *Thieu Uy* if accepted by the unit; the aspirant was commonly known as an "*alpha*," and wore a disc and bar insignia (illustration **E5**).

Next below the aspirant came two grades of "superior NCOs" or warrant officers – *Thuong Si I* (illustration **E6**) and *Thuong Si* – now distinguished, respectively, by 2 and 1 silver bars over three silver chevrons. Below these the other ranks previously suffixed *Nhat* were now suffixed *I* – *Trung Si I* (sergeant first class), *Ha Si I* (sergeant), and *Binh I* (private first class) but their insignia remained unchanged.

F: ARMOR TROOPS

F1: M113A1 APC

The ARVN received its first M113A1s in March 1962; most mounted a .50cal M2 machine gun on the commander's cupola with an added gunshield, but from at least 1963 the ARVN also used a proportion of M113s fitted with this M74 turret mounting two .30cal M37 machine guns. While the US did not use the M74 turret, they did follow the ARVN in mounting two M1919A4s or M60s, usually with shields, one each side of the rear top cargo hatch, for use by men standing on the inside seats. A pair of heavy planks are lashed along the side for use in "soft going." The ARVN units' lack of recovery vehicles capable of unditching an M113 also prompted innovations to improve and speed the crossing of canals, using tow cables and capstan systems, and portable aluminum bridges capable of spanning 30ft gaps.

Vehicle commander and crewmen

US tankers' helmets were seldom seen, and vehicle commanders commonly wore the Armor Corps black beret – unusually for the ARVN, pulled to the right – with its distinctive silver tank-in-a-ring badge (initially only the vehicle commander and driver were trained members of the Armor Corps). This *Thieu Uy* platoon commander displays black rank insignia on the collar of his fatigue shirt, and an armored cavalry regiment patch on his left sleeve. The rest of the crew wear regular fatigues and steel helmets, though one has an old bush hat of French style (note also his obsolete M1 rifle), and one has added a scarf under his helmet to keep the sun off his neck. The crews mostly rode atop the carriers whenever possible, to avoid the effects of mines, RPGs and antiarmor weapons, which were devastating to crewmen inside the M113. When halted, some would dismount to search for command-detonated mine wires and close-in ambushes.

F2: Armor qualification badge, worn above the right breast pocket on service dress.

F3: Officer's version of Armor Corps beret badge; the enlisted ranks' badge was all silver.

F4: Armored Cavalry regiments all wore the same sleeve patch, differenced only by the unit number.

G: TERRITORIAL FORCES

G1: People's Self-Defense Force militiaman

The PSDF was composed of part-time militiamen who wore the black clothing of the peasant farmer. They lacked any crew-served weapons, being issued only with M1 carbines and one BAR or M79 grenade-launcher per platoon; into the 1960s some militiamen were still using French weapons. Powered megaphones were widely used during political rallies.

G2: Regional Force militiaman

The Regional Force were full-time militia under the control of the province chief, organized into battalions, and hundreds of separate companies; the Popular Force was organized into village defense platoons and squads. They were usually indistinguishable apart from their shoulder patches, and perhaps better equipment for the RF. Both the RF and PF began to receive some M16A1 rifles in 1969; companies had two each machine guns and 60mm mortars, and one M79 per squad. This "Ruff-Puff" rifleman crossing a makeshift bamboo bridge is uniformed and equipped basically the same as his regular counterparts, although the RF/PF usually had World War II web gear – in this case a pistol belt and canteen. He carries magazines for his M16A1 in a seven-pocket bandolier, and has hooked a couple of Mk II grenades to his belt – US grenades of all types were widely available to the ARVN.

G3: NCO, National Police Field Force

While not a component of the ARVN, this service operated closely with the RF/PF; one company was assigned to each province, having anything from two to 13 platoons according to the number of districts. They wore distinctive four-tone camouflage fatigues in a pattern of browns and tans (completely ineffective in the field), and black berets with a badge of a red-striped yellow national shield set against an upright sword within a wreath. Armament included M2 carbines, M1 rifles and BARs, among lighter weapons; this NCO carries a .38cal S&W Victory model revolver in a black holster, and an Ithaca Model 37 pump-action 12-gauge shotgun – note the single M14 pouch for its ammo on his M1956 pistol belt.

G4: Regional Force shoulder patch
G5: Popular Force shoulder patch
G6: People's Self-Defense Force shoulder patch
G7: National Police Field Force shoulder patch

H: SENIOR OFFICERS

ARVN officers had available a wide range of more formal uniforms than those worn in the field. Among these were high-collared white coat and black trouser summer, and forest-green winter dress uniforms; and winter and summer service uniforms of, respectively, olive drab coat and trousers, and short-sleeved khaki shirt and trousers. The winter uniforms were seldom seen in Vietnam, but overseas, e.g. when in the USA. Enlisted men were only issued such uniforms if on honor guards or serving with certain high-level commands.

H1: Major-general

One of the common uniforms was this white service dress for formal occasions. This *Thieu Tuong* wears a general officer's cap with gold embroidered leaves and blossoms on the black chinstrap and the gold-edged peak, and the large badge is surmounted by a star. The four-pocket tunic has pleated breast pockets and straight-flapped, unpleated side pockets, and a line of white braid around the cuffs; the matching trousers have seam stripes of similar braid, and are worn with low black laced shoes. Rank is displayed on the stiff shoulderboards, and the left sleeve patch is that of the Joint General Staff: a silver star set on a crossed rifle and palmleaf, set on black wings and anchor, on a red oval. On his right breast he wears metal ARVN jumpwings above a distinguished unit citation ribbon in the US style; on his left, US jumpwings are worn above rows of medal ribbons mounted, in the French style, on a black backing panel.

Two National Police Field Force officers wearing their tan-and-brown speckled camouflage uniforms – see Plate G3 – fighting alongside a Ranger (left) wearing a tiger-stripe uniform. (Nguyen Ngoc Hanh)

H2: Lieutenant-colonel

This *Trung Ta* in starched khaki service uniform wears a field officer's cap, similar to that worn by generals but with a gold braid chinstrap, no gold edge to the peak, and no star above the badge. His rank is shown on black cloth loops on the epaulets. His sleeve patch is that of the Artillery Command – a black cannon on a halved white-and-red shield with opposite-colored edging, with a gold star at the top of the red half (artillery battalions wore the same patch, but with unit numbers replacing the star).

H3: Military Policeman

The *Quan Canh* (military police) guarded army headquarters, government buildings and prisoner-of-war camps, escorted convoys, and performed other typical police duties. He is distinguished by a shiny black helmet-liner marked with red and white stripes and "QC"; a black armband with the same letters; and a white braided whistle-cord round his right shoulder, with ends passing into the right pocket and the shirt front. His pistol belt, with the usually black metal slides here of polished brass, supports a black holster for an M1911A1 .45cal pistol, and a pair of handcuffs. The same black helmet and red-and-white stripes marked "KS" was worn by unit-appointed police patrols, and with reversed white-and-red stripes and "TC" (*Taun Chan* – patrol) by the National Police.

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